Foundation

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The International Review of Science Fiction

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Editorial

Paul March-Russell

This issue features an interview with Peter S. Beagle which I hope you will find interesting in terms of what he has to say about genre, creative writing and the representation of female characters. Inclusion of the interview, though, ignited an intriguing discussion within the editorial team – not quite a Christopher Priest 'talking horse' moment, but bordering upon it. Despite some sf work, Beagle is primarily a fantasy writer and his best-known novel is *The Last Unicorn* (1968). Maybe it was that word, 'unicorn', which did it but, whatever the cause, we had a fascinating conversation about the boundaries between fantasy and science fiction, and what *Foundation*'s place should be within that contested territory.

Could it be that, in some respects, the matter of genre was a lot simpler when the journal started in 1972? Darko Suvin, in the essays that would become *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1973), had ruled fantasy out of court, whilst *New Worlds*, under the editorship of Michael Moorcock, had dismissed epic fantasy as a 'literature of comfort' (views more firmly articulated in Moorcock's 1978 essay, 'Epic Pooh'). It is not insignificant that a number of ex-*New Worlds* writers, including Priest, became early contributors to *Foundation*. This antipathy towards fantasy persisted well into the 1990s and did not perhaps change until the 'Marxism and Fantasy' issue of *Historical Materialism*, co-edited by Mark Bould and China Miéville, in 2002.

But, for writers themselves, the distinctions were not so clear-cut. Authors like Samuel R. Delany, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Gene Wolfe and even Moorcock switched between sf and fantasy or, as in Russ' 'Picnic on Paradise' (1968), combined them. Canons were shifted, replacing J.R.R. Tolkien for Mervyn Peake for instance, rather than exploded altogether. Other traditions, most notably the Weird, were reclaimed by writers like M. John Harrison. And, as for the next generation of authors – and here I am thinking of names like Neil Gaiman, Gwyneth Jones or Kim Newman – fantasy and sf were consumed as one. Until eventually we arrive at the current state of affairs, most clearly expressed by Gary K. Wolfe, of genre markers that have evaporated into thin air.

This is all very well but where does that leave a journal like *Foundation* which, perhaps more than any of its counterparts, was founded with the belief in science fiction as a revolutionary literature (see George Hay's article in *Foundation* 5 (1974))? Does that mean this founding principle has been overtaken by events and is now anachronistic? I think not, although it is notable that at least half of the articles in this issue are more fantasy rather than sf-oriented. For critics, who take either a classificatory or genealogical approach to the definition of science fiction, tropes such as magic tend to be a sticking-point. Unless the

magic can be rationalized, it can't be science fiction, can it? But where would that leave, for example, Robert Heinlein's 'Waldo' (1942), Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife* (1943) or Justina Robson's *Glorious Angels* (2015) reviewed in this issue? Equally, do magic-less fantasies such as Peake's Gormenghast appeal more to sf-inclined audiences, when novels like Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (2004) seem to appeal to both constituencies? And, then again, where do we place Priest's own novels, such as *The Prestige*'s (1995) brilliant meditation on stage magic, performance and science? Perhaps unicorns are just a step too far – but then I have a grainy, black and white image in my mind of a unicorn bearing down upon Patrick Troughton's Doctor ('The Mind Robber' (1968)).

It is precisely this thicket of questions that necessitates a journal such as *Foundation*. Not that there will be any definite answers, but that the journal's ability to critically stand back and to see developments with a long view will grant them greater purchase. This perspective is not only temporal but also spatial and cultural – to what extent is sf produced by indigenous cultures inseparable from what (in the western mind) might be deemed 'fantasy'? (This question is equally applicable to the mystical ideas that inform the origins of the Soviet space programme and the drawings of M.C. Escher, as discussed in the final review-essay.) Similarly, to what degree is this seemingly simple divide between fantasy and sf contested by the diverse identities of producers and consumers such as their age, race and gender? If the delineation between sf and fantasy is not so clear-cut as it was in the 1970s, it is not only because genre boundaries have become more porous (in fact, they always were – think of H.P. Lovecraft's influence on pulp sf in the 1930s) but that the social and cultural infrastructure for sf, who produces, distributes and consumes it, has become more mixed. Although it is unlikely that *Foundation* will be publishing on Harry Potter any time soon, the critical angle that contributors bring to bear on the subject-matter remains all-important. *Foundation* has a vital, continuing role to play within the public understanding of this ever more diverse cultural ecology.

This issue features our second helping from Loncon 3 and, again, I am grateful to the academic track organizer, Emma England, for helping to select the six articles. Besides the tendency towards fantasy, the articles feature a strong interest in questions of gender, sexuality, linguistics and critical theory. And, if you are celebrating, merry Christmas to all our readers!

Why are Alien Languages Inherently Human?

Bettina Beinhoff (Anglia Ruskin University)

Aliens in science fiction and fantasy do not always speak any of our human languages, and unless there is a mode of translation involved (such as the Babel fish in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or the translation circuit of the TARDIS in *Doctor Who*), the languages these aliens speak have the function of contributing to their characterization. As these languages are made they are called 'constructed languages' (conlangs), as compared to most human languages which form naturally. Conlangs can range from just a few words in a novel (like the very sparse examples of Dothraki in *A Game of Thrones*, the first volume of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga) to more developed and reasonably functional languages like Klingon in *Star Trek* or the spoken version of Dothraki in the *Game of Thrones* television series. Regardless of how extensively these languages are developed, they all tend to be very carefully crafted to reveal certain qualities of their speakers.

The associations we make about characters through their conlangs are, in the first instance, caused by sounds and not necessarily by meaning, and therefore make use of sound symbolism. Sound symbolism is the mental connections caused by sounds (see Hinton et al 1994). This implies that any such characterization through conlangs cannot work unless there is some form of agreement between the author and the reader as to the qualities they assign to certain sounds. However, the view that certain sounds evoke certain attitudes is highly contested in linguistics, where evaluative responses are known to be caused by sociocultural or semantic meaning rather than by specific sounds alone (see, for example, studies in variationist sociolinguistics, such as Labov 1972, or Coupland and Bishop's 2007 study on ideologies in the perception of varieties of English).

In this article I will give an overview of some of the considerations that go into constructing the sound systems of conlangs, with particular reference to the role of sound symbolism, but I will also look beyond this concept to see what other decisions and processes influence language creators when they construct the sound systems of their languages. The focus for this initial discussion will largely be on fictional languages, but since they make up only a small part of all constructed languages, other conlangs will be taken into consideration for a more comprehensive account.

Constructed languages (conlangs)

Ria Cheyne defines an artificial language as 'a deliberate construct designed at a particular time for a particular purpose' (2008: 386). This indicates that technically any language which has been (re)constructed is a conlang. This

includes historically relevant conlangs like Raymond Lull's universal language, which was supposed to be comprehensible to everyone regardless of their language background, Gottfried Leibniz's attempts at a philosophical and truly logical language, and François Soudre's Solresol, a language based on the notes of the musical scale. It also includes auxiliary languages like Esperanto, which was created to function as a supposedly neutral world language for cross-cultural communication; fictional languages like George Orwell's Newspeak, or Marc Okrand's Klingon and David J. Peterson's Dothraki, which are used for purposes of plot and characterization. Other conlangs are designed as a way of testing new ideas (for example, Celestial as a philosophical language or Moten as a language that tries to do 'less with more' in terms of linguistic features) whilst some conlangs are created just for fun; they are designed to play with language or to merge features of interest from other languages into an entirely new one.

Due to the immense variety of conlangs and the many reasons behind their creation it is very difficult (and certainly beyond the scope of this article) to present a coherent typology of conlangs that would be able to account for each and every one of them. Rather, I will focus on the process of constructing conlangs, and in particular, on the sound systems of such conlangs, and some of the decision-making processes involved.

Making up the sound system of a language is not the only task in creating a conlang. No conlang could be even marginally functional without a grammar, rules governing meaning relations and pragmatic rules that determine such things like politeness and body language. However, especially in fictional languages, the sounds are the first part of a conlang we are exposed to (whether these sounds are spoken in films or recordings, or written in novels and stories, not taking alien scripts into consideration). The only way we can access other parts of the conlang (like its grammar) is through the sounds.

The stylistics of conlangs

In sf and fantasy, conlangs are often used as stylistic devices. This means that they tend to be used as parts of future societies (like Newspeak in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Anthony Burgess' Nadsat in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)), and in particular to characterize aliens and non-human characters in general. Some stories, such as Jack Vance's *The Languages of Pao* (1958) or H. Beam Piper's 'Omnilingual' (1957), even make conlangs a central part of their plot. Conlangs are 'primarily vehicles for communicating information about the beings who speak such languages' (Cheyne 2008: 396), for example, Klingon was designed to sound particularly outlandish as part of the aliens' characterization (Okrent 2010), while J.R.R. Tolkien went to great lengths to make his Elvish languages aesthetically pleasing, in line with the characterization of the Elves as highly positive protagonists (Weiner and Marshall 2011). In fact, Tolkien's languages were very much based on his personal

sense of aesthetics and on the languages he was familiar with. It comes as little surprise that their sounds can also be found in the major European languages. Tolkien's selection of sounds, especially for his Elvish languages, also reflect his concerns with their fictional culture, where for example the social function of Quenya (the high Elvish language) within Elvish culture can be compared to Latin, which – to some extent – is also reflected in the morphological structure of Quenya (see Weiner and Marshall 2011: 77f.).

However, not all conlangs are used in stories or associated with a character. Conlangs are created for a variety of different reasons. Whatever the reason for constructing a language, how the languages sound is still of great concern for many language creators. To fully understand why certain sounds or sound patterns can cause specific reactions, we need to take the concept of sound symbolism into consideration.

Sound symbolism

Sound symbolism is the association of particular speech sounds with specific meanings, or the 'hypothesized systematic relationship between sound and meaning' (Ohala 1997: 1). Sound symbolism attempts to offer an explanation of why certain words seem to sound, for example, 'beautiful' or 'ugly' to a great number of people, purely based on the sound of the words and regardless of their actual semantic meaning.

In fiction, sound symbolism is an important aspect of naming characters, but it also plays a role in conlangs, as will be discussed later. Hilke Elsen in her study on writers' practices in selecting names for characters, found that authors writing within the genres of fantasy and science fiction would often select names that 'feel right' in revealing the character's main features. In an experiment, she found that the overwhelming majority of participants agreed that the most suitable name for an ugly, evil and huge monster would be Rrul'ghargop rather than Ceena, Gregi or Schti. Similarly, almost all her participants agreed that a great, powerful and good-looking hero would be called Atlan and not Ivsera, Gucky or Gwrgi (Elsen 2008: 97). Elsen's study was conducted in German, with German-speaking participants. In my own lectures and public talks, I have, on several occasions, conducted the same experiment (albeit in a less formal way) with English-speaking participants and have received the same type of response, which indicates that these results may not only apply to the German-speaking context, but can be – at least to some degree –extended to English-speaking settings as well.

While sound symbolism seems to be a firmly accepted notion among fiction writers and many of their readers, this concept occupies a very difficult position in linguistics. There are certainly several reasons for this: an important one has to do with the lack of high-quality evidence for such meaning relations, which discourages many linguists (and especially those working in more theoretical areas) from studying this topic any further. In addition, considerations of

sound symbolism often come with the assumption that these connections are universally applicable across all human languages – a claim which is always problematic given the diversity and sheer number of the world's languages (Diffloth 1994: 107). There is a very extensive, long-standing body of evidence in sociolinguistics which demonstrates that attitudes and perceptions of particular sounds and sound patterns are mostly socially conditioned and, therefore, are bound to differ across cultures (see, for example, research on the social perception of – and attitudes towards – English accents and regional languages by Coupland and Bishop 2007; Garrett et al 2003; Giles 1970; Hiraga 2005; Lippi-Green 1997).

There are, however, a number of studies which have looked at possible instances of sound symbolism across several languages, and these studies have found some evidence of general patterns that could explain why some sounds seem to carry specific meanings. The most compelling of these studies looked at a number of words in a variety of languages and found that, for example, in the words for 'big' and 'small' there is a preference for specific vowels. The following table provides a general example based on a number of European languages.

Language	'Small'	'Large'
English	teeny, wee, itsy-bitsy	humongous
German	klein	groß
Spanish	chico	gordo
French	petit	grand
Greek	/mikros/	/makros/

Table 1: Words for 'big' and 'small' in a number of European languages (after Ohala 1997)

The examples in Table 1 show a preference for the vowels /i/ and /e/ (vowels that are produced with a higher tongue position at the front of the mouth) in words denoting 'small', whereas for 'big', many words contain the vowels /o/ and /a/ (which are produced with a lower tongue position further back in the mouth). This general pattern has proven to be statistically relevant across a great number of the world's languages, though there are many exceptions, as the vowels in the words 'big' and 'small' demonstrate, where a high front vowel appears in 'big' and a lower back vowel appears in 'small'. John Ohala reviewed a number of studies which found that high front vowels like /i/, /e/ and /y/, voiceless consonants like /s/, /p/ and /f/, and high tone (especially in tonal languages like Cantonese and Yoruba) are predominant in the expression of the concept 'small'. The concept 'big' or 'large' is predominantly expressed with low back vowels like /a/ and /o/, voiced consonants like /z/, /b/ and /v/, and low tone (Ohala 1997: 2). There seems to be a direct relation between the acoustic

frequencies and the size of the entity denoted; at some level we may even be able to observe a physiological or biological relation. For example, when producing the sounds /i/ and /e/ the space in our mouths is restricted by our tongue and the relatively high position of our lower jaw, for the sounds /a/ and /o/, however, our tongue and our lower jaw are in a position which creates a lot of space within the mouth (saying these sounds in direct succession gives a good feel of how the space in our mouth changes). In this way, we may even be tempted to argue that the size relations can actually be felt when producing these sounds.

Research questions
Given the above discussions on conlangs, their role especially in fiction, and the role of sound symbolism in perceiving sound relations, the following research questions emerge:

1) What role does sound symbolism play in language creation?
For this question we are mainly concerned with how aware language creators are of the mechanisms of sound symbolism, if they use any specific sounds to denote specific meanings and – especially for languages that are attached to a specific character – if and how sound symbolism in the conlang is used for its characterization.

2) What other factors do language creators take into consideration when constructing the sound system of conlangs?
This question is aimed at any factors apart from sound symbolism that are part of the creation process of the sound system of conlangs. As mentioned above, many conlangs are not created as part of fiction and may thus not be as concerned with issues of specific characterization or related expressiveness as fictional conlangs are. At the same time, sound symbolism may not be as important (or evident) to language creators as it seems to be for fiction writers in Elsen's study, given that they are concerned with language on a different level.

Creating conlangs: main considerations
In order to understand what role the sound system of a conlang plays in the process of its creation, it is necessary to look into the decision-making processes involved. Accounts of better known conlangs give some idea of individual considerations. For example, the aim of making Klingon sound particularly alien made its creator use phonemes and phonological rules which are rare in human languages and which do not co-occur in any one natural language (Okrand et al 2011). These very sporadic reports, however, cannot provide the bigger picture as they are, by default, restricted to a very few well-known and highly popular conlangs, and therefore, not representative of a greater number of conlangs or even fictional conlangs.

To get a first insight into the decision-making processes involved in language creation, specifically with regard to designing the sound systems of conlangs, an online questionnaire (see appendix) was distributed to the conlang community via a popular mailing list. The language creators were incredibly helpful and responsive, and – in addition to answering the questionnaire – also gave very useful comments regarding this study. The questionnaire received 55 unique responses which included 105 conlangs (on average 1.91 conlangs per response, ranging from 1 conlang per response to a maximum of 3 conlangs, though 19 language creators reported to have created far more than 5 conlangs). Around half of these conlangs were languages connected to a fictional character or constructed culture.

The main question of interest to this particular discussion in the questionnaire was: 'What were your main considerations when you were creating the sound system for your conlang(s)? (E.g. ease or difficulty of pronunciation, use of specific patterns.)'. The responses can be summarized along six main themes: ease of pronunciation, aesthetics/beauty, realism/naturalism, theoretical linguistic considerations, influence of other languages and their sounds, sound symbolism. The following sections give a more detailed account of the considerations for each theme; answers from the questionnaire are set in quotation marks and the names of the conlangs to which these responses apply are given in brackets where relevant.

Ease of pronunciation
Ease of pronunciation was most frequently mentioned, which may, of course, have been triggered by the question. It was, however, considered in very different ways. For some language creators, general ease of pronunciation of their conlang was an important matter, while others were primarily concerned with how easy it would be to pronounce the conlang themselves. These two ways of looking at ease of pronunciation are not the same but we can assume that they overlap in some cases. For example, one typical response was 'I like easy pronunciations because I want to speak my language' (Eseh, Neur; but also Ikuranish) which clearly indicates that ease of pronunciation refers to the language creator's pronunciation abilities, while another language 'was intended to have a "universally pronounceable" phonology with minimal distinctions' (conlangA) and would therefore have as its aim to be easily pronounceable not only for its creator but also for a wider community. Indeed, one conlang 'was entirely concerned with ease of pronunciation on a global scale' (Briefscript Project).

The vast majority of responses stated ease of pronunciation as a concern without specifying it further, which could therefore fall into either of the above categories (for example Iaksyon, Aninterite, Konya, Elomi, Qakwan, Senjecas, Athonite, Dawar). Another interesting case is that of a language which was constructed for a dragon, with a sound system that would be pronounceable for

human beings (Torashi). A further topic was ease of pronunciation for a specific group of people; in one case, the aim was to have a language that is *difficult* for native speakers of English to pronounce (conlangB), while conlangs designed for film, television or games have to take into consideration 'actors pronouncing the language' and their limitations in learning new speech sounds (Dothraki, Castithan).

Aesthetics/beauty
Almost half of all respondents mentioned aesthetics and beauty of language as an important feature of their conlangs. This includes very general answers which state that aesthetics was part of the consideration without qualifying any further what this means in the context of their particular conlangs (note that this was not specifically asked for). Two respondents specifically mentioned Tolkien as their source of inspiration with regard to aesthetics in conlangs while most respondents clearly stated their own perception and preferences as the main influences when considering their conlang's aesthetics; for example, when they 'picked sounds that I liked' or 'whatever I thought would be fun'. Some answers explicitly mentioned 'personal aesthetics' (for example, Géarthnuns, Kenrish) while other responses applied to a more general level, such as aiming for a conlang that is 'pleasing to the ear'. The latter comment must be considered to refer to the creator of the conlang, but given its more general phrasing could be seen as extending beyond the particular taste of the individual.

Realism/naturalism
Realism or naturalism were topics of major concern for nine respondents, regardless of whether their conlangs were connected to a fictional character or conculture or not (including Hewrit, Castithan, Táálen, Egeldish and Arandui). The main concerns listed in the replies were that the conlang, should be 'not surprising to see in the wild' or in natural languages, be plausible, have a 'realistic coverage' of sounds in its phonology and reflect certain regional characteristics. A main theme in many of these replies was the concern with 'naturalistic developments' of specific proto-languages or natural languages that these conlangs should follow. This refers to historical developments of natural languages, such as the development of many European languages from Proto-Indo-European (a language which is hypothetical as no written records of it survive), which produced (among others) Germanic, from which West Germanic originates, which then developed into today's German and English (Campbell 1998: 168). These developments can be traced through specific (hypothetical and recorded) sound changes which are often replicated in conlangs for the purpose of added realism but also out of scholarly interest.

Theoretical linguistic considerations
This scholarly interest extends to further areas of linguistics, in particular to certain

linguistic developments and approaches. For example, some respondents were concerned with specific theoretical linguistic considerations in the construction of their languages. Two conlangs were designed with a 'less is more' (Moten) and 'minimalistic' (Tatari Faran) approach to their sound systems, meaning that their creators tried to develop these languages whilst using very few sounds, rules or a more general minimalistic inventory of linguistic items and processes.

Other conlangs were constructed with special attention to rules of vowel harmony (referring to specific assimilatory processes in a language's phonology) and aspects of balance within the phoneme inventories and contrasts. Other language creators used their conlangs as a way of applying specific rules and structures; for example, Ikuranish was created with a relatively limited phonology; in Kiitra words are formed through agglutination (a sequence of morphemes like suffixes and prefixes); Jeila is a language with an isolating structure (using very few morphemes but rather single words as grammatical units); and Senjecas is based on the sounds described for (Proto-)Indo-Germanic.

Influence of other languages and their sounds
Other languages (especially natural languages) and their sound systems were an influence for about a third of all respondents. These influences come from a wide range of languages, including Austronesian languages, Indonesian languages, Native North American languages, Semitic languages, Modern and Ancient Greek, Gothic and early Germanic languages, Old Norse, Old English, Indo-European, Sanskrit and Esperanto. Noteworthy is the great interest in historically attested, yet extinct, European languages, which relates to the aim of creating a realistic and natural sounding conlang. At the same time, many language creators draw on explicitly non-European languages as a source of inspiration, which in many cases is linked to the desire to create languages that sound different from widely known European-based languages. Further influences include instances of onomatopoeia (attested to for at least two conlangs) which is closely connected to the concept of sound symbolism.

Sound symbolism – or rather sound-meaning relations – were mentioned explicitly in one of the questions in the questionnaire. The answers clearly suggest that sound symbolism is a factor in the language creation process, though it may not surface in all conlangs in the same way. Sound symbolism is not regularly employed as this would clash with other factors, such as realism/ naturalism. In this way, sound symbolism in conlangs shows similarities to natural languages where many exceptions apply.

Sound symbolism in conlangs
Many language creators are very well aware of the concept of sound symbolism and some make explicit use of it in their languages. In some cases, the connection between sound and meaning follows very sophisticated philosophical patterns (especially Celestial) while many conlangs have specific sounds for specific

meanings which may not necessarily be found in natural languages on a larger scale ('unrounded velar ejectives are associated with dangerous things' in Jorayn or 'words meaning icky or unpleasant things end in /-p/' in Kash). In general, the following concepts or meanings tend to be connected to specific sounds or sound patterns:

- positive vs negative or good vs bad or pleasant vs unpleasant
- big vs small
- gender (usually male, female, neuter)
- motion (e.g. inward vs outward)
- brightness/lightness
- shape (e.g. length, roundness)

While specific patterns of sound symbolism (and especially the relation of sounds like /i/ and /e/ to the concept 'small' and sounds like /o/ and /a/ for the concept 'big') are well attested for natural languages, this may not necessarily be the case for conlangs. After all, language creators may want to create an alien language which diverts considerably from natural language patterns, or they may deliberately want to avoid usual patterns of sound symbolism for other reasons. This could result in specific sound patterns being assigned to meanings they would not normally be associated with in natural languages; for example, the above instance may be reversed, where /i/ and /e/ stand for the concept 'big'. To investigate this matter further, I asked some of the language creators who took part in the survey for translations of specific words in their conlangs. Giving an analysis of all the translations would be beyond the scope of this article, but the following examples of the words for the concept 'small' and 'big' should give a general idea of the use of specific sounds. These examples of conlangs were very kindly provided by the creators of these languages (except for the Klingon examples, which are taken from the *Klingon-English Dictionary* (1992)).

Language	'small'	'big'
Dothraki	naqis	zhokwa
Itlani	kilikit	gidanit
Moten	pleg	tuna
Egeldish	/sɪnɛ/	/gon/
Celestial	bexogio (small size relation)	gexogio (large size relation)
Klingon	mach	tln

Table 2: Words for 'small' and 'big' in six conlangs

The examples in Table 2 indicate that some conlangs clearly make use of sound symbolism in its usual sense. There is a clear preference for the vowels /i/, /ɪ/ and /e/ (relatively high front vowels) in words for 'small' and for the vowels /a/, /ɔ/ and /o/ (vowels that are more in the lower back region) across the languages Dothraki, Itlani, Moten and Egeldish. Note though, that other vowels are used in addition, as in Itlani 'gidanit' for 'big' which includes two /i/ sounds next to the one low vowel /a/, thus breaking the pattern. Similarly, the Dothraki word for 'small' also has a low vowel next to the high front vowel. Interestingly, the conlangs Celestial and Klingon do not follow the pattern at all. For Klingon this is probably part of the deliberate attempt at constructing a language that has few 'typical' natural language features as indeed, in Klingon we find the opposite of what we would expect as a typical pattern for 'big' and 'small' in natural languages. In Klingon, the word for 'small' has a low vowel, whereas the word for 'big' has a high vowel. Celestial, however, has a somewhat different status as it is intended to be more of a philosophical language where sounds and patterns carry very specific meanings, and the combination of these sounds creates new and more complex meaning relations. In that respect, Celestial uses sounds and their combination to create meaning in a different way and not on the same level as sound symbolism in natural languages. In the above example, the initial consonant denotes 'small' or 'large' within size relations (specified by the following two syllables).

Conclusion

This article has investigated the relation between sound and meaning in conlangs based on a questionnaire distributed in the community of language creators. While the main consideration of this study is with fictional languages, other conlangs which are not fictional and not related to particular characters were included as well, to provide a more detailed basis for discussion.

Regarding the research questions, it became clear that sound symbolism does play a role in many conlangs where language creators make meaning and sound relations explicitly part of these languages. However, the way this relation is encoded can vary widely depending on the conlang. Language creators listed many concepts which are expressed through sound symbolism, some of which were also discussed for natural languages, such as size relations and, related to it, gender (Ohala 1994 and 1997). Other concepts are less obvious in natural languages but appear across conlangs, such as positive vs negative (also described as good vs bad or pleasant vs unpleasant), motion, brightness/lightness and shape. Similarly, the way these meaning relations are expressed can differ considerably between conlangs and can also be different from natural languages, as, for example, Klingon which deliberately makes use of untypical features (Okrand et al 2011), and Celestial, which is concerned with sound-meaning relations at a very abstract level. These findings do not only apply to fictional conlangs which have the added function of characterizing specific

protagonists, but extend to non-fictional conlangs as well. At the same time, not every conlang makes specific use of sound symbolism and many language creators are more concerned with other factors.

The survey revealed a great number of other factors that language creators are concerned with when creating the sound systems of languages. These factors included ease of pronunciation, aesthetics/beauty, naturalism/realism, theoretical linguistic considerations, and the influence of other languages. All of these factors were important for both fictional and non-fictional conlangs except for theoretical linguistic considerations which – unsurprisingly – was not very relevant for fictional conlangs. These factors seem to be interrelated as, for example, the aim to make a conlang sound realistic influences the extent to which sound symbolism can be used. This also means that for language creators sound symbolism is one factor among many, which distinguishes them quite clearly from the fiction writers in Elsen's study who were merely concerned with naming their characters according to specific qualities they wished to reflect in these names rather than designing an entire language for them.

It is important to note that this article only looked at sound systems in conlangs; however, not all conlangs are spoken. Given that the main purpose was to look at aspects of language which only appear in speech, this was a necessary restriction. The survey was conducted in English, which means that it only included language creators who were able to speak English. This will have introduced a bias towards language creators from a more Anglo-centric background. It would be useful to conduct similar surveys in other cultural contexts to see how far the results from this survey can be generalized.

Finally, by now I hope that the answer to the question 'Why are alien languages inherently human?' will be fairly obvious (and I should specify that by 'alien' languages I mean conlangs designed for alien fictional characters). After all, sound symbolism (which this article is mainly concerned with), but also other factors such as aesthetics or ease of pronunciation can only be approached from a human basis. Even in cases where a language is designed to be alien and thus non-human (like Klingon) it can only be so by human standards. This means using human sounds (otherwise it would be difficult to recognize it as a language) in an untypical way, where untypical again refers to our expectations and our knowledge about (human) languages. Regardless of whether we follow or flout the rules of human language, we are still bound to use them as a benchmark, shaped by our knowledge of other languages, our social perceptions of specific speech sounds and – to some extent – biological factors. Conlangs in fiction are created by human beings for other human beings who have to be able to make sense of the conlangs at some level in order for the conlang to serve its purpose.

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Appendix: Questionnaire – The Sound(s) of Constructed Languages (Conlangs)

Dear Conlanger,

Many thanks for taking the time to look at this website. I would like to invite

you to fill in the following questionnaire which will ask you questions about the sound system of your constructed language (conlang). I am mainly interested in how you decided for or against certain sounds or patterns in your conlang phonology, and you will find that many questions address sociolinguistic and stylistic issues.

Any conlang qualifies for inclusion in this study as long as it has some phonology; if you find that you cannot answer a particular question it is fine to say so and to skip to the next question.

General questions

1) How many conlangs have you constructed so far (to any extent)?

2) Please select up to three of your conlangs for inclusion in this questionnaire; it is important that in the following questions you will only refer to these three conlangs.

Name of conlang 1:
Name of conlang 2:
Name of conlang 3:

3) I agree that the name(s) of my conlang(s) may be used when reporting on this study in academic publications and presentations.
Yes/no

Sound system

Just as a reminder: the main point of interest of the following questions is the sound system/phonology of your conlang(s); other aspects are interesting where they influence how the language sounds (e.g. repetition in morphology or syntax could influence the rhythm of a language, etc.).

4) What were your main considerations when you were creating the sound system for your conlang(s)? (E.g. ease or difficulty of pronunciation, use of specific patterns)

5) Did you design your conlang(s) for a fictional character?
Yes/no
If yes:
Please give a brief description of this character and, if appropriate, its culture.

6) Is (any of) your conlang(s) a stylistic element (e.g. in fiction) and is not used by a fictional character?
Yes/no
If yes:
1) Please give a brief description of the function of your conlang.

7) Is (any of) your conlang(s) based on natural languages or on conlangs that existed previously?
Yes/no
If yes:
7.1) Please give a brief description of what languages are the basis of your conlang(s)
7.2) Please give a brief description of how these languages influenced your conlang(s).

Sound symbolism/stereotyping

8) Do any specific sounds and patterns have particular meanings in your conlang(s)?
(E.g. in some natural languages particular sounds may stand for the concept 'small' while others may be 'big' sounds)
Yes/no
If yes:
8.1) Please briefly describe any such connections between sound and meaning.

Translations

9) Please provide a translation of the following terms in your conlang(s). If your conlang does not have this concept then please use the closest related concept (e.g. eagle = bird of prey).

    a. Sparrow
    b. Eagle
    c. Pigeon
    d. Cat
    e. Kitten
    f. Lion
    g. Mouse
    h. Elephant
    i. Water
    j. Fire

k.   Baby
l.   Child
m. Man
n. Woman
o. Small
p. Big
q. Harmless
r. Dangerous
s. Friendly
t. Aggressive
u. Good
v. Bad
w. Peace
x. War
y. Thank you

Language skills

10)   What language(s) do you consider to be your native/ first language(s)?

11)   What languages do you speak?

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire.

Disfigured Myths: The Destruction of London in Postmillennial SF Film

Andrew M. Butler (Canterbury Christ Church University)

There is a moment in Rob Bowman's *Reign of Fire* (2002) when the hero, Quinn Abercromby (Christian Bale), climbs a wall from a river, gazes across at a semi-destroyed Palace of Westminster and says, 'Well, this town's gone to Hell.' It is not the only landmark to have survived several decades of destruction: Tower Bridge has also made it through. This article explores the symbolism and meaning of such landmarks, drawing upon the ideas of Charles Peirce, Roland Barthes and Sigmund Freud, within a number of recent British science fiction films: *Reign of Fire*, *28 Days Later* (2002) and its sequel *28 Weeks Later* (2007), and *Children of Men* (2006). To already indicate the instability of a British identity that these films work to prop up, only *28 Days Later* is a fully British production whereas the others are co-productions. The director of *Reign of Fire* is American, of *28 Weeks Later* Spanish, and of *Children of Men* Mexican, but they all feature a British-born star (although the protagonist of *28 Days Later* is Irish-born).

These films draw upon a lineage of apocalypses and invasion narratives set against the backdrop of London. This history includes Richard Jeffries' *After London* (1885) and H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). The apocalyptic fictions of M.P. Shiel and S. Fowler Wright follow suit, by using familiar London landmarks, as do John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962). More recently, China Miéville set his novella, *The Tain* (2002), in the heart of an invaded London (cf. Butler 2013: 133–53). Recognizable London locations have also featured prominently in such apocalyptic films as *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) whilst, memorably, *Doctor Who* juxtaposed two of its most famous monsters – the Daleks and the Cybermen – with such landmarks as Westminster Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral (respectively 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth' (1964) and 'The Invasion' (1968).

These architectural icons not only have a synecdochal relationship to the city, in that they evoke the totality of what passes for real London, they are also likely to resonate with viewers from the rest of the world too. Tower Bridge, for example, states a film's London credentials – as in its use as a quarantine point in Neil Marshall's *Doomsday* (2008) – even if it may occasionally be mistaken for London Bridge. The mock-gothic towers, built between 1886 and 1894, suggest it is much older than it is: for example, it appears in the opening shot to Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd* (2007) although the film is set in 1846. (By contrast, Guy Ritchie rightly shows it still being built in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), set in 1891, although it seems rather too close to the Palace of Westminster.)

Such confusing anachronism works to suggest the eternal nature of Britain. No matter how fantastical the science-fiction elements of the film become, it is rooted in a recognizable location – even if the filmmakers' geography can leave something to be desired.[1] The unfamiliar is rooted in the familiar, the uncanny in the canny. It points to a sense of jeopardy – the audience may be made to care more because it appears to be a real rather than fictional location and allows for identification to a greater degree with the characters. As Peter Hutchings notes, 'the prominence of famous landmarks [functions] as a guarantor that the story's events are being played out in relation to a real city' (Hutchings 2009: 196). Charlotte Brunsdon lists the range of landmarks that are taken to be instantly familiar: 'the Palace of Westminster, Tower Bridge and Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column […] the Tower of London, St Paul's […] Richard Rogers' 1986 Lloyd's Building, the Millennium Wheel, Tate Modern and 30 St Mary Axe (the Gherkin)' (Brunsdon 2007: 22). These are perhaps clichés of London, knowingly used by directors as a visual shorthand and consciously aping earlier films. Landmarks are shuffled and relocated from film to film and designate the paradigm of London.

The opening sequence of *Reign of Fire*, set some time before August 2005, begins with the young Quinn (Ben Thornton) stood in Trafalgar Square among the pigeons looking toward the Palace of Westminster and then visiting his mother (Alice Krige) in the workings for a Docklands Light Railway extension, somewhere in the Borough Road area south of the Thames. Whilst he is there, the workers discover a huge subterranean cave and Quinn is persuaded to crawl in to investigate. He discovers and wakens a sleeping dragon, narrowly escaping with his life when the reptile kills the workers and his mother. A montage of newspaper headlines and other images follows which includes Quinn's story, an inferno in Kenya, fires in Paris, a shot of the Elizabeth Tower, science magazines locating a new species, a US presidential order for bombing raids. Dragons are seen off China, stylized fires across a globe, a mushroom cloud, a demolished city landscape, walking feet, before the narrative resumes with an older and buffer Quinn hewing a rock face with a pickaxe. The dragon has been there for millennia and has reproduced at an exponential rate, taking over the world.

This underground discovery echoes Nigel Kneale's TV serial *Quatermass and the Pit* (1959; filmed 1967), in which Martians from five million years ago are found at Hobbs Lane Underground, Knightsbridge, during an extension to the Central Line. Brunsdon notes that the Martian spaceship 'embodies the generic hybridity of the film – buried deep below ground, it nevertheless seems to have come from outer space. The horror of the film lies in the eruption of an archaic future – the awakening of a former invasion from Mars – and it is the disturbance of the earth in the proposed extension of the Underground which excites these hidden temporalities' (Brunsdon: 2007: 10). The excavation into historic – indeed, prehistoric – London clay 'muddles time, producing a

space which is past and future, contemporary and archaic' (Brunsdon 2007: 11). The television version was made in the aftermath of race riots – Kneale described it as 'a race-hatred fable' (Kneale 1959: 86) – and directly addresses the new multicultural society; for example, by including a black workman among the digging crew. Brunsdon also notes the film's contemporaneity with the excavation of the Victoria Line (1962–8), the first post-war line to be completed but with a name that looked back to the previous century, and the centrality of Miss Judd (Christine Finn/Barbara Shelley) as a competent female character who does not flee in clichéd horror.

In his chapter on *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, I.Q. Hunter suggests that 'the underlying fear' is 'that postwar social changes, whether represented by the liberated young or by phenomena like race riots, will spark off "primitive" urges hitherto damped down by consensual ideologies and the repressions of the British character' (Hunter 1999: 110). Something that is novel – liberated women, immigrants – is paradoxically represented as something ancient that returns. In his essay on 'The Uncanny' (1919), Sigmund Freud argues that 'an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed' (Freud 1985: 372). The status of Britishness is challenged by something that is both anterior to and postdates it; its mechanisms are perpetuated by immigrants, workers and women, all of whom seem like spectral presences. In *Reign of Fire*, this uncanny eruption into the present is resolved by Quinn being persuaded into returning to London and the scene of his mother's death. There, on the south bank of the Thames, to the west of the original lair, Quinn kills the male dragon. Significantly, Tower Bridge is visible in the background, the towers remaining, but the bascules destroyed.

In the simplified version of the signifying model taken from Charles Peirce, a sign can have iconic, indexical or symbolic qualities. These three relations map onto the connections between the object, the interpretant who perceives the object and the referent in which the interpretant (and in theory the object) exist. The icon is a representation of an object and is likely to consist of different materials from the object; indeed the object itself may not exist as such. It thus depends on a degree of recognition by the viewer, either from the real world or between shots. This marks a relationship between the interpretant and the object. The indexical sign points to the existence of something – as in the adage 'there's no smoke without fire'. This marks a relationship between the object and the referent, and there is a concrete, physical connection between the two. Finally, the symbolic relation is one where a deeper idea or notion is represented, requiring the existence of the interpretant for that idea to be held. This marks a relationship between the interpretant and the referent. The ruined Palace of Westminster in *Reign of Fire* is a representation of a real building, here in ruins, operating on the most obvious level of signification to perform

the characters' location. It is indexical of the decades of death and destruction wrought by the dragons, especially the fire that folklore associates with them and the film represents – here is where the fire reigns from. And finally on a symbolic level, the Palace of Westminster symbolizes the Mother of Parliaments, a millennium-old place of royal and political leadership, largely burned down in 1512, threatened with destruction by Guy Fawkes in 1605, burned again in 1834 and rebuilt by Charles Barry with the assistance of Augustus Pugin.

The associations of the Palace of Westminster and other cinematic landmarks are mythic in the senses used by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Lévi-Strauss suggests that 'a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages – anyway, long ago' (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 430). Whilst clearly not all the cinematic landmarks are old, the notion of the past is invoked. He goes on to assert that 'what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future' (430). The Palace of Westminster is represented as archaic in the sense of age and of power, its power is everlasting and explains British society. Barthes' version of myth builds upon that 'alleged' and undercuts the everlasting nature of the pattern: myth operates ideologically to naturalize the status quo.

For example, in his analysis 'Wine and Milk' (1957), Barthes notes that French society 'calls anyone who does not believe in wine by names such as sick, disabled or depraved […] an award of good integration is given to whoever is a practicing wine-drinker: knowing how to drink is a national technique which serves to qualify the Frenchman' (Barthes 1972: 59). Wine carries with it values of Frenchness and is also a product of French industry – further it is a product of industry that has been expanded beyond the immediate boundaries of the country to its colonies:

> Its production is deeply involved in French capitalism, whether it is that of the private distillers or that of the big settlers in Algeria who impose on the Muslims, on the very land of which they have been dispossessed, a crop of which they have no need, while they lack even bread. (61)

The myth of wine thus allows the circulation of the ideas of Frenchness whilst suppressing the narrative of colonial and working-class oppression which allows its consumption: 'wine cannot be an unalloyedly blissful substance, except if we wrongfully forget that it is also the product of an expropriation' (61). Barthes later asserts in 'Myth Today' (1953): 'Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact' (143). Myth creates an image of the past to assert the eternal, everlasting and natural nature of the present.

Tom Shippey has applied Barthes' methodology to a reading of a recurring science-fiction trope: a toppled or destroyed Statue of Liberty as portrayed, for example, on a cover of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* (December 1966), in Norman Spinrad's 'A Thing of Beauty' (1973) and, most famously, the ending to *Planet of the Apes* (1968). As a sign, the Statue of Liberty stands for American values – part of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – and is associated, through the words of Emma Lazarus' sonnet 'The New Colossus', with an open door to the oppressed: 'Give me your tired, your poor,/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free'. Placed on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, it was passed by many of the immigrants to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also a symbol of entente between French and American imperial powers. Shippey argues that the ruined sign has a further meaning: 'one has to see *first* that the Statue [of Liberty] has a mythical significance, and *then* to see that this significance is being denied' (Shippey 1991: 106). Drawing also on Paul de Man, Shippey argues that this is a myth disfigured, 'offering a national ideal something other than reverence: it was offering the notion that America might (would? should? must?) eventually fall' (108).

In the films under consideration we see a small number of London landmarks destroyed, under threat or repurposed: the Houses of Parliament or Palace of Westminster, especially the Clock Tower (now Elizabeth Tower) popularly referred to as Big Ben, and Westminster Bridge; Trafalgar Square with the National Gallery and Admiralty Arch; St Paul's Cathedral, the Millennium Bridge and Tate Modern; Tower Bridge; Battersea Power Station; the BT Tower, usually known as the Post Office Tower; the Millennium Dome and 30 St Mary Axe. The question is how to define the myth that is being promulgated or undercut by these landmarks. It could be objected that they are likely to have a number of different meanings, since the films are the labour of a series of directors, scriptwriters, producers, special effects technicians and so forth, but myth appears to transcend individual authorship. Barthes argues:

> The whole of France is steeped in this anonymous ideology: our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world. (Barthes 1972: 139)

There is no reason not to assume that substituting the word 'British' here would not also be true of British mythology.

However, in the run-up to the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014, the supporters of the No campaign articulated that there was something definably British without ever quite being able to define it, beyond the notion of tolerance. There is the 'nation of shopkeepers' label from Napoleon,

the playing fields of Eton, the stiff upper lip and sense of fair play, and above all a sense of an unbroken line of heritage. In 1990, Norman Tebbit suggested that one could establish Britishness by seeing which side one cheered for in an England cricket match. There is all too often a slippage from Britain to England to the south east to London – and in an illustration of how the ruling class dictate the ruling ideas, it is dominated by the white, male, upper-middle classes. *Reign of Fire* moves from London to Northumbria and back; *28 Days Later*, after a Cambridge prologue, shifts north from London, *Children of Men* begins in London but moves to a Kentish road to Canterbury and to Bexhill, Sussex. There is less effort to find landmarks in such sequences, so I will not focus on the non-metropolitan sequences. In discussing British national cinema, Andrew Higson notes the significance in British identity of patrician benevolence, deference to authority, classlessness, obligation and duty, but 'there is a powerful, coherent, and pervasive image of the people in English culture, an image of an organic community which is hierarchically and deferentially organized, as if this were entirely natural' (Higson 1995: 44). Note again the slippage between Britain and England.

London is the former centre of an empire that spread across the world, with explorers, traders and armies flowing in one direction and gold, tea, sugar, coffee, diamonds and wealth flowing in the other, for a period underscored by slavery in the colonies. A combination of geology and geography kick-started an industrial revolution, which both demanded raw materials and created consumer goods, in time creating and requiring a moneyed, leisured, middle-class market. Some of the spoils of empire ended up in the British Museum, where they could be 'protected' and 'looked after'. An accident of geography – the line drawn north and south from London through the poles would continue through the Pacific – made London (in particular Greenwich) a convenient location for the Prime Meridian, established in 1851 and confirmed in 1884 as the longitudinal centre for mapping. London became the centre of time, space, trade and culture. The Church of England, in theory centred on Canterbury but arguably as located in Lambeth Palace and Westminster Abbey, is a belief-system with a worldwide congregation that dominated intellectual and cultural life – with many on the left being defined by their nonconformist (Methodist, Quaker, Unitarian etc.) backgrounds. The BBC became a pioneering national and international broadcaster through radio, with its television programmes receiving international distribution. But this empire has long since collapsed, with the twentieth century seeing colonies one by one being given or taking their independence. Britain continues to assert its significance – as cultural hub, as birthplace of the widest distributed if not spoken language, as stock market, as cradle of democracy – in a way that is more mythic than actual.

This island story was most obviously seen in the four-hour opening ceremony to the 2012 Olympics, *Isles of Wonder*, which drew on British history, literature, film, music and technology and celebrated, among other things, the Industrial

Revolution and the National Health Service, as well as featuring a cameo of the Queen supposedly jumping into the stadium from a helicopter with James Bond. Its director was Danny Boyle, who also made *28 Days Later*. At the time of the sequel's release, Boyle said:

> I think the key thing about Britain is that it's built on this deep, dark ocean of history. There are grassy, picturesque areas of London which you still can't put train tunnels through because they're actually covering plague pits. You just don't get that in America – that dark abyss of the past. (qtd Kermode 2007)

In *28 Days Later* Boyle draws upon that mythic past of London and brings back plague victims as a kind of technologized undead. As Jayna Brown observes, the film 'echoes the memory of the Great Plague of London in 1665, which ended in the great fire of London. As a result of this plague, most London residents fled, but doctors and apothecaries (early pharmacists) stayed in the city' (Brown 2013: 133).

The prologue establishes that a virus, Rage, has been released from an experimental laboratory in Cambridge after a raid by animal liberationists, and the majority of the British population have been infected, becoming crazed zombie-like beings. In an echo of the opening to *The Day of the Triffids*, cycle courier Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes up alone in St Thomas' Hospital, unaware of the unfolding disaster. He wanders around a deserted London, crossing Waterloo Bridge with a view of St Paul's in the background, passes the Palace of Westminster and Horse Guards Parade, before crossing St James' Park to the Duke of York Steps by the ICA. He makes his way up to Tottenham Court Road and the Centre Point tower, before going to Piccadilly Circus, now transformed into a message board for the missing and the presumed dead. He is pursued by infected people, before being rescued by Selena (Naomie Harris) and Mark (Noah Huntley), and taken to a hideout in an Underground station. Selena and Mark accompany him to Deptford, near Greenwich, where he discovers that his parents have killed themselves, and Mark is infected and killed. Jim and Selena retreat to the Balfron Tower (designed by Ernő Goldfinger in 1963) in Poplar, East London, where they meet and stay with Frank (Brendan Gleeson) and his daughter, Hannah (Megan Burns).

Having passed an iconic (but overturned) red London Routemaster bus earlier in his wanderings, Jim now leaves the city in a London black cab and is driven through the kind of idyllic rural landscape that forms the mythic green and pleasant land. They are in search of a group of survivors who claim to have the answer to the virus, in the vicinity of Manchester, but who turn out to be a quasi-military operation run by Major Henry West (Christopher Eccleston). This is a familiar trope from Wyndham and other cosy catastrophe novels, as well as the TV series *Survivors* (1974–7); West's forename is presumably a nod to the various kings of that name, especially the eighth, and his surname a

nod to the hegemony. With his demands for obedience and his threats of rape, he represents the worst aspect of medieval baronies. For Brown, this evokes 'Britain at the height of the colonial era' (Brown 2013: 134). Both the white (but underage) Hannah and black Selena are second-class citizens, lacking the full rights that might be grudgingly offered to Jim (played by an Irish actor) if he agrees to conform. Britain has collapsed and has the chance to rebuild – the film critiques an attempt to rebuild it in the same image.

28 Weeks Later begins when Don (Robert Carlyle), his wife Alice (Catherine McCormack) and other survivors let a young boy into their country cottage on the outskirts of London. Unfortunately, the infected have followed him and attack; Don escapes, assuming Alice to have been killed. Meanwhile, Don and Alice's children, Tammy (Imogen Poots) and Andy (Mackintosh Muggleton) return from a school holiday in Spain to a Britain under American martial law and are interned in District One (the Isle of Dogs). They are reunited with Don, but, when Andy becomes worried that he has forgotten their mother's face, he and Tammy escape to find a picture of her in their house near Wembley. A looted moped eases their journey, and naturally they cross the river at Tower Bridge, from north to south so that the Gherkin can be visible in the shot, and pass St Paul's. Remarkably, they find their mother camped out in their old house, apparently infected but calm in their presence, and the three are returned to District One where Don is infected by his wife. As Rage spreads around the enclave, the children are helped to escape and told to make their way to the new Wembley Stadium, where they will be airlifted to safety; Don pursues them as the US military decide to bomb Docklands.

Whilst – even a year before the 2008 banking crisis hit – there is an undeniable pleasure in seeing an attack on one of the heartlands of British capitalism, there is also an unease at the brutality of the American intervention. If *28 Days Later* was frequently read for its (unwitting) echoes of 9/11 imagery, so *28 Weeks Later* acknowledges five years of American military manoeuvres. Nicole Birch-Bayley argues that '*28 Weeks Later* in many ways mirrors the pervading sense of futility in modern military intervention. Like the contemporary intercession in Iraq, the attempts of the American troops to assist in solving the problems of London and the rage virus merely result in antagonizing the situation' (Birch-Bayley 2012: 1143). Neither civilian nor military organizations are able to resist the anarchy of Rage. The use of a special effect of the new Wembley Stadium points to the film's very contemporaneity, whilst a brief shot of rampaging plague victims and the instantly recognizable Eiffel Tower is indexical of a downbeat ending where France has now been infected.

Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation of P.D. James' 1992 dystopia, *Children of Men*, makes many changes to its source material. In the novel, the Oxford don Dr Theo Faron keeps a diary of a Britain transformed by the drop in sperm rates to zero, and the consequent lack of births. Faron's cousin, Xan Lyppiatt, has appointed himself Warden of England and has abolished democracy. Faron

is approached by the Five Fishes organization to ask Lyppiatt for reform, but fails. He goes to mainland Europe for the summer and returns to find Julian, the wife of the leader of the Five Fishes, is pregnant. In the film, Faron (Clive Owen) is a former activist turned bureaucrat, who is first seen hearing the news of the killing of the last born human in a café near St Paul's Cathedral. All the women have become infertile and Britain has become a totalitarian state. There is an explosion, Faron escapes, but is kidnapped by the Fishes, and asked by one of their leaders, his ex-wife Julian (Julianne Moore), to get exit papers for a woman, Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey). Theo arranges to have a meeting with his cousin Nigel (Danny Huston), a government minister, and is driven across London via Buckingham Palace to Battersea Power Station (designed by Theo J. Halliday and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott; built 1929–35). The latter is a symbol for London's industrial heritage but – as the inflatable flying pigs in the back of shots reminds us – became more widely known from the cover to Pink Floyd's 1977 LP, *Animals.* While this establishes the scene as supposedly within Battersea Power Station, the interior ramp is clearly Tate Modern, the revamped Bankside Power Station (also designed by Gilbert Scott; built 1947–63). The power station has become an 'ark of art', including Michelangelo's *David* (1501–4), Pablo Picasso's anti-war *Guernica* (1937) and Banksy's *Kissing Coppers* (2004), each of which must have been appropriated from other collections. For much of the film Faron wears a London 2012 t-shirt, confirming the action as being after the London Olympics.

The London shown here is one of barriers and checkpoints, of areas out of bounds and fenced off. It is fortress Britain at its most blatant, with a white, straight, middle-class male as its viewpoint character on a journey of redemption toward an image of the Holy Family (Theo/Joseph, Kee/Mary and Dillon/Jesus) floating toward a rescue boat, *Tomorrow*, from the Human Project who are looking to repopulate the world. Zahid Chaudhary notes the mythic weight that Kee is made to carry as 'Eve, Madonna, Earth Mother, figure of subjection, animal-like black woman, humanity's last and only hope, excessively fertile black woman, damsel in distress' (Chaudhary 2009: 96). The future of the British world is dependent on an illegal immigrant now in exile, just as Britain had been built upon the spoils of empire. It is not clear that this latter group will use Kee any less than the Fishes or the British government.

The deliberate imagining of traumatic events, the insistent disfiguring of myth, can be understood through Freudian ideas. Hutchings notes how 'the city's emptiness [is] revealed as deceptive, with something monstrous lurking behind the scenes' (Hutchings 2009: 197). As with the plot of *Reign of Fire*, he reaches for the term 'uncanny', Freud's description of the horror derived from the return of repressed memories as well as for the catalytic object or experience – doubles, ghosts, crypts, corpses – that leads to such recall. For example, in one of his most celebrated case studies, Freud associates the apocalyptic fantasies of Daniel Paul Schreber, an appeal court judge with

paranoid delusions and homosexual tendencies, with a deep-seated trauma incurred at an earlier stage of his psychosexual development – the castration anxieties of the Oedipus complex, the sadomasochistic stages of the anal and oral phases (Freud 1979: 138–223). The question remains, though, as to why individuals deliberately choose to experience the uncanny.

In his essay, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), Freud describes his grandson's habit of throwing objects away from him:in particular, a wooden toy on a string that he would propel out of sight whilst crying 'o-o-o-o', and then reel joyfully in again with the word 'Da' ('there'). Freud and the boy's mother suggested that the first cry was a version of the German word 'Fort' ('gone'), and there was a sorrow and joy being staged with the deliberate exiling and return of the object. The Fort-Da game enabled the child to come to terms with feelings of loss over his often absent mother, to inoculate against that fear of absence which in a sense is a fear of death (Freud 1955: 14–16). What has become popularly known as the 'Death Drive' – but is better translated as the 'Death Instinct' – is paradoxically a survival tactic that reassures a traumatized subject. We see a burning London, a toppled Tower Bridge, which will reassure ourselves that London will not fall.

Within the films, we repeatedly come across parent-child dyads that would risk uncannily resurrecting the Oedipus complex. In *28 Days Later*, Jim finds his parents have committed suicide, preventing his parricide (and perhaps stirring a sense of guilt over that forbidden desire) and any acting out of the desire for the mother. In *28 Weeks Later*, Tammy and Andy see their parents transformed into uncanny, infected doubles, no longer the loving parental figures they should be. In *Children of Men*, the issue of infertility foregrounds such relationships by putting a pregnant mother in jeopardy; Theo, whose son Dillon has died, has a sacrificial father-figure in the shape of Jasper (Michael Caine) and gains a substitute son when Kee declares that she will name her baby after him. Most strikingly, the death of Quinn's mother is part of the primal trauma of the dragon apocalypse in *Reign of Fire*, and he has to return to that nest to kill the father dragon. We also see Quinn as substitute father to the children in the north – acting out an Oedipal drama from *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) – as good father in conflict with the bad American paternalism of Denton Van Zan (Matthew McConaughey).

There are a number of traumas that the films may be responding to. Much post-Second World War British science fiction seems be responding to that war and the curious utopia of the Blitz spirit, as well as the ability to begin again from scratch that was made possible by the destruction. The Cold War anxieties also led to a questioning of western values and of the Allied powers, with the spectre of a final, apocalyptic Third World War and nuclear Armageddon. Whilst these films are about sixty years after the end of the Second World War and two decades after the end of the Cold War, these battles are replayed, as their directors came of age during the era of nuclear paranoia. It also seems that

the scars of British imperialism are revealed by these films – the post-imperial melancholy of losing an empire and not finding a role, the guilt over slavery and oppression, with London as the uncanny, guilty-ridden black hole at the heart of that collapse. Roger Luckhurst argues that London becomes 'understood as a site saturated with the iconography and geography of imperial power, but which has been transformed by the twin effects of the dismantlement of empire and successive waves of migrations from former colonies' (Luckhurst 2005: 295). The significance of black women should be noted in the films (cf. Trimble 2011: 249-70), as well as the historical linkages between zombies and slavery in Haitian culture (albeit a French rather than a British colony) for a reading of *28 Days Later*. *Children of Men* directly represents British fears of immigrants whilst American interference in British affairs is clearly resented in *Reign of Fire* and *28 Weeks Later*.

At the heart of these films is a struggle between the myth and the myth's disfigurement, made all the more intense by the ongoing difficulties of defining British identity. The films both avow and disavow the heritage of Britain, the eternity of Britishness whilst showing that Britishness as under attack from something from an earlier era or from beyond its fortress shores. At the height of Tony Blair's government, which had wrapped itself in the novelty of Cool Britannia,[2] anticipating and echoing the aftermath to 9/11, these films dramatize anxieties about Britishness. Hutchings argues that 'Ultimately, perhaps, their significance lies mainly in the negations they offer of more confident assertions of identity found elsewhere in British culture during this period. In placing question marks over particular landscapes, and rendering those question marks as bloody and as threatening as possible, such fictions generate unease about who the British are and where they came from (and where they might be going). That the fictions offer no real answers to the questions they raise is possibly their most disturbing aspect' (Hutchings 2004: 39). The disfiguring of the myth might, as Shippey argues, indicate that these things shall pass – but in the dramatization of the return of the repressed there is also an expression of the life-affirming qualities of the Death Instinct. This allows the myth of Britishness to be asserted, insisted on and performed through an act of irony.

Endnotes

[1] Steve Kerry pointed out to me that the twilight shot of the dragon flying across London is back to front in *Reign of Fire*, with the sun in the wrong direction. Nevertheless, the presence in the background of Tower Bridge is indexical of the city being London.

[2] For the context to and a critique of Cool Britannia see Luckhurst 2003: 417–35 and Butler 2003: 374–93. My use of post-imperial melancholy is indebted to Luckhurst's work. See also Nairn 1981 and Baucom 1996: 259–88.

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Anticipations:
H.G. Wells, Science Fiction
and Radical Visions
8-10 July 2016

H.G. Wells Conference
Centre, Woking, UK
Organized by the H.G. Wells
Society

H.G. Wells was a novelist, social commentator and utopianist, and is regarded as one of the fathers of science fiction. His early scientific romances featured time travel, mad scientists, alien invasion, space travel, invisibility, utopia, future war and histories of the future: his mappings of the shape of things to come was an overture to over a century of science fiction.

We wish to mark the 150th and 70th anniversaries of Wells's birth and death respectively by exploring his science fiction, his precursors and successors and his lasting influence upon the genre in print, on film, on television, on radio, online and elsewhere. This is especially appropriate because the event will be held at the H.G. Wells Conference centre in Woking, the town where Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds*. Many of his ideas on politics, science, sociology and the direction in which he feared humanity was going were contained in his early science fiction and ran through his later influential work.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- specific individual or groups of novels/stories;
- the connections between Wells's fiction and nonfiction, including his political, utopian and scientific writings;
- utopia/dystopia;
- histories of the future;
- precursors to Wells's sf;
- sf writers influenced by Wells;
- sequels by other hands;
- adaptations into other media.

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Visiting the Ancient Land of the Dead in Le Guin and Riordan

Frances Foster (University of Cambridge)

This article examines two works of children's fantasy, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005) and Ursula Le Guin's third Earthsea book, *The Farthest Shore* (1973), in which the central theme – one that dates back to antiquity – is that the hero must travel to the Land of the Dead. The journey to the underworld, known as a 'katabasis', must be accomplished while the hero is alive; it is their return which marks them out as truly heroic. In its essence, the katabasis can be seen as the 'heroic quest par excellence, in that it represents the triumph of the vital principle over the forces of death' (Cook 2009: 26). This article builds on my work in *Foundation* 118, in which I explored Le Guin's use of an inverted nekuomantic rite in her later Earthsea book *The Other Wind* (2001). In this current article, I will focus on those parts of Homer's *Odyssey* which describe a katabasis (rather than a nekuomantic rite), in order to read similar descriptions in Riordan and Le Guin.

In her introduction to *Reception Studies* (2003), Lorna Hardwick suggests that an analysis of texts which make reference to classical sources can not only yield 'insights into the receiving society' but also 'focus critical attention back towards the ancient source' (Hardwick 2003: 4). Riordan and Le Guin envisage the ancient past differently, and draw on disparate aspects of antiquity. Thus, reading their work through the lens of an ancient text can give us insights into how their own texts function. At the same time, their own readings and interpretations of an ancient text can provide us with different angles on how that text operates.

Riordan's novel is set in a twenty-first century America which is simultaneously inhabited by Greek gods and mythical monsters. Hades is therefore located in the DoA (Dead on Arrival) Recording Studios at the western edge of California. By contrast, Le Guin's Earthsea series takes place in a traditional fantasy world, which appears medieval in its lack of both technology and large urban communities. Despite the difference in their respective settings, both narratives use the ancient, and especially Greco-Roman, idea of the katabasis to resolve their respective imbalance of power. Riordan gives Percy a traditional-style quest, in which he needs to retrieve Zeus' lightning bolt from Hades and return it to Olympus. In the *The Farthest Shore*, Ged makes a lengthy sea-voyage to a land known only as 'the dry land', the home of the dead, which lies beyond the edge of the westernmost island in Earthsea. My analysis will show how the journeys, the location of the land of the dead, and the entrance and exit of the protagonists can be seen to follow aspects of the model of Odysseus' voyage to the underworld in Book 11 of Homer's epic (all translations mine).

Complexities in Odysseus' Narrative

Odysseus' story follows the adventures of many of his mythological predecessors, who also made a similar type of journey. Our oldest full katabasis story is that of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, recorded over four thousand years ago, in which the eponymous hero travels to the land of the dead following the death of his companion Enkidu, a journey which has been termed 'the definitive heroic adventure' (Van Nortwick 1996: 28). Within Greek mythology, various heroes also made the journey: Polydeuces went to rescue his dead brother; Orpheus his dead wife; Theseus tried to steal Persephone; and for one of his labours, Herakles had to steal Cerberus from Hades. The aim of Odysseus' journey, by contrast, is closer to that of Gilgamesh's: 'Odysseus retrieves from Hades not a denizen of the underworld, but insight into the forces governing his existence and into his ultimate destiny' (Cook 2009: 26). Odysseus is told by Circe that he must go to Hades in order to learn how he might return home, although he is not actually given this information in any detail. Instead, he learns about how and where he will die. Thus, Odysseus' journey 'brings the hero face to face with mortality' (Van Nortwick 2009: 57), as what he brings back from Hades is not just knowledge of others' deaths (which have already happened), but knowledge about the manner of his own death. The other thing which Odysseus achieves through his journey is an increase in his heroic stature. Debbie Felton has suggested that the katabasis forms the way in which Greek heroes may learn 'that the best way for a mortal to attain immortality is to achieve a heroic reputation through brave and memorable deeds' (Felton 2007: 94). Thus, Odysseus' katabasis not only forces him to understand his own mortality but also to evaluate how he can enhance what people will say about him after his death. Of course, it is Odysseus who narrates the story of his katabasis, and he is not a narrator to be trusted elsewhere in the epic. But, by telling the story, Odysseus increases his own heroic stature through the narrative, regardless of whether his audience, the Phaeacians, or we (as the text's audience) actually believe his story.

Odysseus' tale of how he travelled to Hades and what he did when he got there is complex, and at times, downright contradictory. There has been much scholarly discussion about the inconsistencies in *Odyssey* 11, and therefore about the text's composition. Walter Burkert has observed that 'contradictions are freely tolerated' within the *Odyssey* (1985: 196). However, the main point of contradiction for my purposes is the nature and location of Odysseus' actual encounter with the dead. Bruce Louden has said that *Odyssey* 11 combines distinct and separate genres of myth: the *katabasis* itself and another tradition, the nekuomantic rite, a cultic ritual of consulting souls of the dead at a dedicated shrine (Louden 2011: 197). Odysseus' encounter with the dead is complex precisely because the poem blends together these two strands, so that when he arrives on the shore by the grove of Persephone, he does not make a standard heroic *entry* into the underworld, but initially carries out a mystic ritual over a

pit containing blood for the shades to drink from so that he may consult them. Michael Clarke has suggested that in the *Odyssey* 'we begin with an account of conjuration of spirits (nekuomanteion) but end up with a journey through the underworld (katabasis)' (Clarke 1999: 215), though the mixing of the two strands is rather more problematic. For my purposes, I would like to suggest that Odysseus' physical sea voyage to Hades forms the very first part of his katabasis, which is then fulfilled by his later visit within Hades, towards the end of his narrative.

Travelling to the Land of the Dead
The physical journey itself is the first heroic achievement in travelling to the land of the dead. However, the journey Odysseus makes to reach the land of the dead is not described as dangerous or even lengthy. He is instructed to make this visit by the daughter of the sun, Circe, and it is she who also gives him the directions and means to get there. Odysseus tells us that Circe's island Aeaea lies at the easternmost edge of the world, 'the Aeaean island, where the house and dances of early rising Dawn are, and the rising sun' [*νῆσόν τ᾽ Αἰαίην, ὅθι τ᾽ Ἠοῦς ἠριγενείης / οἰκία καὶ χοροί εἰσι καὶ ἀντολαὶ Ἠελίοιο*] (*Odyssey* 12.3–4). Circe tells Odysseus that he must sail due west from her island until 'in your ship you have crossed past the Ocean' [*ἂν δὴ νηὶ δι᾽ Ὠκεανοῖο περήσῃς*] (*Odyssey* 10.508), but she emphasizes that he will not have to worry about exactly how he is to get there: the winds will automatically send him in the right direction. His subsequent journey is probably one of the easiest journeys he makes in the entire epic (certainly, while he is awake): there are no storms, no monsters, and no distractions on the journey. Circe has sent a 'favourable fair wind' [*ἴκμενον οὖρον*] (11.7) which hurries them on by filling their sails, and the 'wind and pilot' [*ἄνεμός τε κυβερνήτης*] (11.10) steers their ship, while they simply sit back and wait. This journey is unusual for Odysseus precisely because it is so easy for him to accomplish, and he has a clear and achievable goal.

Percy's actual journey is rather more complicated by comparison. He needs to travel across America from east to west coast. However, the most obvious method of modern transport is forbidden to him on account of the impending war between his father, Poseidon, and Zeus as god of the skies:

> 'Oh', I said. 'Naturally. So we just get on a plane—'
> 'No!' Grover shrieked. 'Percy, what are you thinking? Have you ever been on a plane in your life?'
> […]
> 'Okay,' I said, determined not to look at the storm. 'So I'll travel overland.' (Riordan 2010: 147)

This prohibition already means that Percy's journey is much longer than Odysseus': to travel by train or coach across the continent takes about four

days. However, Percy's journey is further complicated by the interruptions he experiences from the copious number of monsters (and some gods) which attempt to delay him or try to kill him and his companions. In this way, Percy's quest is composed of several different transport methods: when he encounters a monster, he is often forced to change his plans. First, he is taken by private hire car to catch a long-distance bus from New York. This part of the journey is cut short when he is accosted by the Furies, and forced to walk in the woods until he has raised the money for a train from New Jersey to Denver. He is able to hitch-hike a lift on the back of an animal transport lorry as far as Las Vegas, after which he has the funds to take a taxi the last leg of the way to Los Angeles.

On his journey, Percy encounters the Furies, Medusa, Echidna with a Chimera, undertakes a side-quest for Ares, and is delayed in the Lotus Casino before he reaches Los Angeles itself, where he is nearly killed by Procrustes. This is an impressive list of monsters, considering even Odysseus only claims to have experienced five monstrous encounters before his monster-free journey to Hades: the Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops, Aeolus, the Laestrygonians, and finally, Circe. Odysseus' curiosity could be blamed for his meetings with the Cyclops, Circe and the Laestrygonians, and his poor leadership for the disastrous outcome of his meeting with Aeolus. Percy is more concerned about his companions than Odysseus in every encounter, and does not leave them to satisfy the hunger of monsters. He is also explicitly not to blame for the various attacks which he experiences (although he frequently blames himself for not being more observant). However, both characters experience a visit to the land of the Lotus Eaters. Percy, unlike Odysseus, is taken in by the Lotus Casino, and has to become more observant in order to realize what is happening to him. Odysseus, as always, claims not to have been taken in by any such tricks. Percy's adventures form the nature of his journey to Hades, while Odysseus' adventures are part of his overall journey back to his home in Ithaca, and separate from his journey to Hades.

Le Guin's Earthsea is a very different world from Riordan's loud and commercialized America. Earthsea is a non-technological world, which is closer in some respects to the world of the *Odyssey* than Riordan's modernized gods. Le Guin has herself suggested that the image of Earthsea's dry land was influenced by (among others) 'the Greco-Roman idea of Hades' realm' (Le Guin 2004). Like Odysseus, Ged makes his journey by sea – given the nature of the Archipelago's island geography, this is not surprising. His journey is long in both time and space: the voyage takes many months, from early spring to high summer, and his destination is about a thousand miles away. Unlike Percy and Odysseus, Ged does not travel directly to the land of the dead, because at the start of his journey he does not know where he will need to go. Percy and Odysseus are both told by a divine authority that they must travel to the land of the dead, but in Earthsea there are no visible deities governing action or telling human beings what to do. Ged has to make his own choices. He has no

means of transport available to him at this point beyond his boat, although he can control it with a mage wind just as Circe could send Odysseus a favourable wind to guide him to Hades. While Odysseus and Percy begin their journeys in the east of their respective worlds, Ged begins his journey in the centre, not the east, at Roke island and begins by travelling south, first to the island of Wathort. His encounters then take him southwest, and beyond the farthest island on the south-western edge of Earthsea. At this point he sails north, to the island of Selidor at the far western edge of Earthsea. Ged and his companion Arren have to contend with various trials on the journey, but they are all human, not divine, and only monstrous in the sense that they are indicative of a deep imbalance in the world.

Each journey can be judged as heroic but at different levels. Odysseus' journey is straightforward but heroic because it is impossible for Odysseus to reach Hades without divine assistance – not only would he go the wrong way, he surely would not go far enough: he travels to Hades in only one day, leaving at sunrise and arriving at sunset. Percy's survival alone is heroic, considering the number of monsters he has to ward off or kill. Ged does not boast about his journey in the way that Odysseus and Percy do, but the journey itself is much more frightening. He sees people suffering, and sees the despair of people driven mad, although he cannot do anything about it. Ged's journey is heroic not only because he survives it, but also because he is able to navigate his way without any external guidance or assistance.

Location of the Land of the Dead
The land of the dead is situated in the western edge of the world in all three texts. Odysseus leaves Circe's island at sunrise, and sails due west until 'the sun went down, and all the ways were dark' [*δύσετό τ' ἠέλιος σκιόωντό τε πᾶσαι ἀγυιαί*] (11.12), and his ship 'reaches deep flowing Ocean's boundary' [*ἐς πείραθ' ἵκανε βαθυρρόου Ὠκεανοῖο*] (11.13) at the very western edge of the world. Here, the Ocean is envisaged as a stream of fresh water encircling the inhabited world, both land and sea, as it is also represented on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18, and its waters 'thus define the borders of the universe' (Marinatos 2001: 395). Odysseus crosses the river Ocean in order to reach the land Circe described to him. When he reaches the boundary of the river Ocean, he states that this is the location of the kingdom of the Cimmerians, and they are 'hidden in mist and cloud' [*ἠέρι καὶ νεφέλῃ κεκαλυμμένοι*] (11.15), a place where the sun never rises because the land lies beyond the sun's path. The next five lines of text emphasize the sun's absence from this place at all times of the day and night, and how this point beyond the inhabited world lies in perpetual darkness, emphasizing the total finality of the sunset described when 'the sun went down and all the ways were dark' (11.12). Nanno Marinatos has demonstrated that 'the sun does not go to Hades according to Archaic cosmology' (Marinatos 2010: 195), and therefore that the solar day is limited to the inhabited world

and not the world beyond. This part of Odysseus' journey lies outside normal time as well as beyond normal space. Darkness thus becomes endemic to the experience of Hades which Odysseus narrates, and it is representative of the westerly location of the land of the dead. The west is linked to sunset: our term 'Occident' comes from the Latin '*occido*' which means 'I kill', but such ideas are also traceable to Egyptian and ancient near eastern sources (Marinatos 2001). However, Odysseus suggests that after he had crossed the Ocean, and arrived at the confluence of rivers which 'Circe had described' [*ὃν φράσε Κίρκη*] (11.22), he had effectively reached Hades. He does not need to travel downwards to reach Hades, and at no point in his narrative is there any suggestion that he needs to move below the surface of the earth, although when he performs his nekuomantic rite, he calls the spirits of the dead up to him from below.

Percy learns that the Underworld maintains its westerly location. His teacher Chiron informs him:

> 'The entrance to the Underworld is always in the west. It moves from age to age, just like Olympus. Right now, of course, it's in America.'
> 'Where?'
> Chiron looked surprised. 'I thought that would be obvious enough. The entrance to the Underworld is in Los Angeles.' (Riordan 2010: 147)

Within the series of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, America is represented by Percy (who is the first-person narrator) as the inhabited world: Percy does not really consider the world beyond or outside it. Therefore, the western edge of the inhabited world within this context is the west coast of the North American continent. However, the entrance to the underworld is, as Chiron says, *in* Los Angeles, not beyond it. After Percy's encounter with Procrustes in Los Angeles, he discovers a flier for DOA Recording Studios, with an address and a map. He comments that it is located 'only a block' (Riordan 2010: 282) away from where they are standing and they simply walk there. Interestingly, therefore, this situates the Underworld *within*, rather than beyond, the edge of the western world. Percy does not have to cross a sea to reach it nor does he have to leave the inhabited world. The Underworld proper, however, turns out to be located *below* Los Angeles, following an alternative tradition, such as that in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the subterranean nature of the underworld also accounts for a lack of sunlight.

Earthsea's dry land is expressly located at the western edge of the Archipelago. In Le Guin's later *Earthsea* books, it is located further west than west (Le Guin 2003: 227), but in *The Farthest Shore* Ged is told by the dragon Orm Embar to go to the island of Selidor, and this is the physical place at which he enters the dry land. Ged approaches Selidor by boat, a journey that has taken him further than the known world as he encounters the Children of the

Open Sea: 'We have left places behind us. We have sailed off the maps' (Le Guin 1979: 408). However, as he approaches Selidor 'the way ahead' grows 'dark' (439). The island itself is barren and empty: 'beautiful and desolate' (443). On Selidor itself, as Ged and Arren come closer to entering the dry land, we are told:

> Though it was full summer the wind blew chill, coming from the west, from the endless landless reaches of the open sea. A mist veiled the sky, and no stars shone above the hills on which no hearth-fire or window-light had ever gleamed. (446)

The imagery echoes the last stages of Odysseus' voyage, when 'the sun went down and all the ways were dark' (*Odyssey* 11.12). It also evokes the landscape of the Cimmerians 'covered in mist and cloud' (11.15), where the sun never shines. As Ged follows the dragon onto the western edge of Selidor, moments before he enters the dry land, 'the sun failed and dimmed, though it stood high on a clear sky. A darkness came over the beach' (Le Guin 1979: 452). The dry land, like Hades, is linked to darkness. Ged and his companion do not experience sunlight again until they emerge from the dry land onto Selidor, and the fog clears letting in the view of 'sunlight on the open sea' (472). As Marinatos has observed, Odysseus and his companions leave sunlight on their way to Hades, and only see it again when they return to Circe's island the next morning, therefore 'Odysseus seems to have moved beyond the realm of the sun's orbit when he sails across the ocean to Hades' (Marinatos 2010: 196). This is perhaps indicative of the way in which the dry land, too, is located beyond the normal world, as it is beyond the sun's path. In addition, the dry land is physically beyond the mappable world. Although Ged goes to Selidor to enter the dry land, Orm Embar has expressly told him the location of the wizard he is looking for: 'You will find him on Selidor, but not on Selidor' (Le Guin 1979: 438). The dry land is not itself located on Selidor, although Selidor provides a suitable gateway to enter it. It is beyond, just as the Halls of Hades are beyond the Ocean's stream.

Entering the Land of the Dead

When Odysseus beaches his ship on the far side of the River Ocean, and walks to the place Circe has described, he carries out the various rituals he was instructed to. This action brings him into contact with the dead, who simply appear around him:

> They gathered *up* out of Erebus, the souls of the dead who had died.
> [αἱ δ᾽ἀγέροντο
> ψυχαὶ ὑπὲξ Ἐρέβευς νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων] (*Odyssey* 11.256)

This first part of his narrative forms the nekuomantic rite: he has come to the right place and does not need to enter a particular location; instead, the dead come *up* and gather around him. Those parts of Odysseus' narrative which comprise his actual katabasis later on are part of a continuous narration, so there is no point at which he specifically passes through a gateway or entrance.

Percy, however, makes a much more formalized entrance into the underworld. When he walks up to the building, he stands 'in the shadows of Valencia Boulevard, looking up at gold letters etched in black marble: DOA RECORDING STUDIOS' (Riordan 2010: 283): this is a physical place which he can walk into without any rituals. When he enters the building, he finds himself already in a part of the underworld itself, surrounded by the dead:

> The carpet and walls were steel grey […] The furniture was black leather, and every seat was taken. There were people sitting on couches, people standing up, people staring out the windows or waiting for the elevator. Nobody moved, or talked, or did much of anything. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see them all just fine, but if I focused on any one of them in particular, they started looking […] transparent. I could see right through their bodies. (Riordan 2010: 284)

In Percy's description, these dead are in limbo, in a waiting room, before their entry into the underworld proper. This is much more structured and organized than Odysseus' swarms of shades. In the nekuomantic part of Odysseus' narrative, the shades swarm around him in a chaotic fashion, and there is no distinction between the newly dead and not yet buried (such as his friend Elpenor, who died the morning they left Circe's island) and those shades who died years beforehand, like his mother and the seer Teiresias. In the later, more firmly katabatic part of Odysseus' narrative (particularly lines 568–627), there seems to be limited organization among the dead. He sees Minos, Tantalus and Sisyphus who are all depicted in the scenery typically associated with their afterlives, but he does not indicate that he has moved around Hades. After speaking to Herakles, whose appearance he describes in detail, Odysseus tells us that the hero 'again went into the house of Hades' [ὁ μὲν αὖτις ἔβη δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω], but in contrast 'I waited on the spot just there' [ἐγὼν αὐτοῦ μένον ἔμπεδον] (11.627-8), hoping to see more heroes. This implies that, even during his katabasis, Odysseus' experience of Hades is chaotic and lacking structure: the dead he sees are restless shades who move about freely.

The world of Percy Jackson is explicitly based on Greek, rather than Roman, mythology. However, the structure of the Underworld is much more organized and landscaped than Odysseus' Hades. Riordan's underworld is divided into different stages: the ferry crossing of the River Styx, the Plains of Judgement, Elysium and Tartarus, and thus it ironically resembles Virgil's

more complex underworld geography in the *Aeneid*, even to the extent of incorporating (fictitious) contemporary characters within the mythical world. The most Homeric part of Riordan's underworld is the so-called 'Fields of Asphodel'. This refers to the place which Achilles wanders off to after his meeting with Odysseus:

> and the soul of the swift-footed son of Aeacus drifted through the asphodel meadow in long strides
>
> [ψυχὴ δὲ ποδώκεος Αἰακίδαο
> φοίτα μακρὰ βιβῶσα κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα] (*Odyssey* 11.538–9)

In Riordan's underworld, it is the location where the majority of the dead remain, because they did not wish to be judged. They exist in a large formless crowd, and they do not move or act: 'a field […] packed with people […] there is no noise, no light […] Whispering masses of people are just milling around in the shadows, waiting for a concert that will never start' (Riordan 2010: 300). This is reminiscent of Achilles' attitude to death: he complains that being king of all the dead is less rewarding than being a living hired farmhand. Riordan has merged a range of traditions to form Percy's experience of the underworld, and Percy sees landmarks which we would think of as typical of the underworld, such as Charon the ferryman, although they do not appear in Homer but are later additions to the myth.

Ged's entry to the land of the dead is more mystical than Percy's, although it still contains a recognizable threshold, unlike Odysseus'. Ged waits on the shore of Selidor, and his transition into the land of the dead is otherworldly: 'a darkness gathered into them, that same shapeless darkness that swelled and dimmed the sunlight. […] It was like an archway or a gate, though dim and without outline; and through it was neither pale sand nor ocean, but a long slope of darkness going down into the dark […] they went forward into the dry land' (Le Guin 1979: 453–4). Ged seems to go through the threshold, but it also appears to come to him, as the darkness shifts and gathers towards him. Thus, although he makes the step into the dry land, he also seems to call it towards him. The darkness resembles Hades: both locations are beyond the path of the sun. As a result, the dry land itself is bare, and Arren notices that 'he could make out nothing distinctly, except that he and his companion stood on the slope of a hill, and before them was a low wall of stones, no higher than a man's knee' (455). This landscape is formless and dark, but the wall of stones marks its boundary point (as we learn in *The Other Wind*), which Ged and Arren must cross to enter the dry land properly. This wall of stones acts as an additional boundary, beyond the sea. It is perhaps equivalent to Odysseus' confluence of rivers, where he is instructed to dig his trench to consult with the dead. While Odysseus thus only stands at the edge of Hades, and waits for the shades to come to him, Ged and Arren cross into the dry land, over the wall of stones, and enter it properly.

Leaving the Land of the Dead

Ged and Arren's journey continues through the dry land. They cross several boundary markers, past the liminal 'wall of stones' (455), through 'the shadows of a shadow city' (456), in a bleak landscape, across a 'dry river' (459), until finally, by climbing the Mountains of Pain, they return to the shore of Selidor. This landscape is mapped out and organized, rather than Odysseus' more formless empty space. The dry land is as barren as Odysseus' Hades, but Ged's journey is more difficult because he must cross it, rather than simply visit it. Once he has reached the dry river he cannot turn back, but must take the only way out, which is through the Mountains of Pain:

> They were in the valley directly under the Mountains of Pain. There were rocks underfoot, and boulders about them, […] as if this narrow valley might be the dry bed of a river of water that had once run here, or the course of a river of fire long since cold, from the volcanoes that reared their black, unmerciful peaks above. (459)

This dry river is symbolic of the dry land as a whole but it also evokes the chthonic river of flaming fire, Pyriphlegethon. Odysseus does not describe this river directly but he narrates Circe's description of it as a boundary point to locate the place in which he should carry out his nekuomantic rite: 'There, into Acheron, flow both Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, which is a branch of the Stygian waters' [*ἔνθα μὲν εἰς Ἀχέροντα Πυριφλεγέθων τε ῥέουσι / Κώκυτός θ', ὃς δὴ Στυγὸς ὕδατός ἐστιν ἀπορρώξ*] (*Odyssey* 10.513-4). The dry river is a symbol of the land's sterility: even in Hades there is no suggestion that most of the rivers flow with anything other than water.

When Odysseus first summons up the dead in the pit at the edge of Hades, the dead come up uncontrollably in crowds, and it frightens him: 'The many shades drifted around the pit in all directions with a clamourous shriek: pale fear seized me' [*οἳ πολλοὶ περὶ βόθρον ἐφοίτων ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος / θεσπεσίῃ ἰαχῇ: ἐμὲ δὲ χλωρὸν δέος ᾕρει*] (*Odyssey* 11.42-3). The shades drift around and make a terrible noise, perhaps eager to get to the blood which Odysseus has prepared, so he has to defend himself (and the blood) with his sword. Riordan's dead souls in the Fields of Asphodel resemble Odysseus' drifting shades to the extent that they 'will come up to you and speak, but their voices sound like chatter, like bats twittering' (Riordan 2010: 301). Their noise, however, is not frightening to Percy and his companions. Percy reports that he finds them sad and he feels pity for them although, considering Percy's frequent encounters with bloodthirsty monsters, anything which does not make an attempt against his life holds less fear. Ged and Arren also feel no fear of the dead in the dry land, because the dead do nothing, to them or to each other: 'All those who he saw […] stood still, or moved slowly and with no purpose' (Le Guin 1979: 456).

The shades in all three texts drift but cannot harm the living. Yet while

Percy, Ged and their companions feel pity for the crowds of unidentified dead, Odysseus is terrified. A second sighting of the crowds of the dead causes him 'pale fear' again. This makes Odysseus' final exit from Hades appear not particularly heroic, although it is perhaps Ged and Arren who have the hardest task, stopping up the leak in the dry land which has led to the unbalancing of the world. Unlike Percy and Odysseus, they have no divinities looking out for them, guiding them out of the land of the dead. Ged needs to use his powers to change the landscape of the land of the dead, and in so doing, he loses his magery. In reshaping the landscape of the land of the dead, Ged has to use up his powers, and leave them behind in the dry land. He returns to Earthsea as an ordinary human being whilst his companion is crowned king. Le Guin, therefore, does not conform to the traditional homeward journey of the heroic quest since Ged loses, rather than gains, an essential part of his character.

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Would You Like to Violate Rule Nine with Me?

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In Lois McMaster Bujold's novel *Barrayar* (1991), the protagonist Cordelia is a stranger on an adopted planet. During her sometimes rocky introduction to Barrayaran culture, Cordelia compiles a list of socio-sexual mores between the genders, whose insight and awareness of the complicated and often contradictory codes of behaviour reduces her husband, Aral Vorkosigan, to fits of laughter. And, as her homeworld is far more liberal, Cordelia's Rules become an introduction to intimacy for the couple. Readers are never enlightened about the exact content of Cordelia's Rules, but the conversation highlights that an implicit part of most discussions of sexuality is the acceptable standard for social behaviour. Unorthodox sexual practices not only test the boundaries of tolerance but also what constitutes social unacceptability. Our sexual identities touch on the core of our being so that any examination of sexual responses strikes at the heart of questions about identity and self-realization. In the estranged environments of fantasy literature, the parameters of normative and culturally acceptable behaviours become more extended and open to challenging representations, offering a critical contrast to the normative values of the real world. The fantasy works of Lois McMaster Bujold, Anne Bishop and Jacqueline Carey outline divergent models of sexual behaviour which question established values of gender, variation and consent.

While each author challenges constructions of female sexuality and critiques the socially normative attitudes that accompany these constructions in different ways, there are underlying similarities between the works. The search for self and identity is a key theme, one that is frequently alluded to in the characters' search for romantic and sexual fulfilment; as is the need for acceptance of the whole self, and of others. All three writers share a strong theme of romantic fulfilment through equality and the sharing of the true self with another during sex. Sexual encounters become a tool for understanding, for gaining insight into oneself and one's partner, whereas sexual dissatisfaction is often indicative of any flaws within the relationship. Unlike many traditional romances, however, encounters with several sexual partners become part of the search for self-identity, particularly in the case of protagonists who are female prostitutes, where encounters with clients do not always provide gratification but can provide insight. The problematic status of consent in the primary world is challenged by the authors' consistent emphasis on the necessity and value of consent in these secondary worlds. They often engage directly with the very nature and parameters of consensual sex, questioning the social limitations placed on female sexuality.

Bujold: resistance via reconstruction

The masculine ideals that permeate speculative fictions have long reflected and reinforced traditional roles that are valorized in the primary world. Steven Cohan notes that hegemonic masculinity is a 'regulatory fiction of normality' that 'articulates various social relations of power as an issue of gender normality' (qtd Baker 2006: 33), rather than a 'biologically or naturally occurring role' (Baker 2006: 5). While Ursula Le Guin has described the traditional representation of women in science fiction as 'squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters – or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs – or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes' (Le Guin 1975: 208), Bujold engages strongly with such questions of gender identity, couched within a wider discussion of what it is to be human. Although the attempted historicity of pseudo-medieval fantasy could be said to encourage traditional gender relations, Bujold makes significant adjustments to her portrayal of characters even within contexts that resonate with historical detail.

Furthermore, although '[t]he gender ideology most often detected in generic fiction is extremely conservative, stereotyping women into the role of virgin or whore, and as the object of a quest or adventure' (Cranny-Francis 1990: 18–9), Bujold places female characters in roles usually reserved for males or provides them with the agency and self-determination of their masculine counterparts. The positioning of females in stereotypically masculine roles allows them the freedom to become the subject and activator of narrative events. The hero's journey in these narratives is reformed into a heroine's journey of re-awakening and reclaiming, of which Sylvia Kelso notes, 'this picture of a woman struggling from a chrysalis of stagnation to begin a second life is a staple of feminist fiction' (Kelso 2009: 74). Bujold carefully resists placing women in binary roles such as 'virgin' or 'whore', but where she does create characters who approach these categories – such as Ijada in *The Hallowed Hunt* (2005) and Iselle in *The Curse of Chalion* (2001) – she provides them with the agency (respectively, supernatural and political/economic) to resist the passivity that usually characterizes women in these roles.

There is, however, more to reforming cultural attitudes to women than simple role-reversal, a complexity noted by Brian Attebery:

> One way to reshuffle the cards is to postulate a different set of gender differences, setting up contrasting identities that seem to correspond to, but are ultimately not congruent with, the ones we take for granted […] with the ultimate effect of displacing the masculine from its privileged position in epistemology. (Attebery 2002: 162)

Bujold does this frequently, reshuffling the tropes of gender, so that where she does use traditional gender types, the concurrent inclusion of behaviour usually identified as belonging to the 'other' gender, dramatically inverts and complicates the trope. Women and women's issues are hard to ignore in Bujold's

texts: through the presentation of so many active, varied and central female characters, the frequent inclusion of female-centred topics and technology, and the consistent use of a female perspective and subjectivity as a focal-point around which the action of the narrative turns.

For example, Dowager Royina Ista, Princess Fara and Royesse Iselle can be described, on the surface, as typical princess figures. As loyal wives and daughters, they embody traditional positions of passive authority, but they have profound impact on the events of the novels and the history of their nations, both cultural and political. Bujold presents divergent characters who are individuals rather than representatives of a type. Ista's burgeoning secular and spiritual power allows her to break free of these stereotypical positions, and the resistance towards conformist representations of women's sexuality she provides, are significant appropriations of the greater license allowed for masculine characters in speculative fiction. For example, in *Paladin of Souls* (2003), Ista readily acknowledges her attraction to a male character, Illvin, and by the end of the novel engages in a relationship with him outside matrimony and without shame. However, Bujold also includes stereotypical traits in her construction of Ista, such as her experiences of motherhood and the loss of her once-famous beauty, in a manner which is typical of her narratives, where complex partial positions and reversals appear frequently. The resistance of normative gender roles by using 'codedly feminine' (Roberts 1987: 139) and codedly masculine characters is a hallmark of Bujold's narratives.

Chalion and the Weald are clearly extrapolations of medieval Spain and Germany, however, Bujold's resistance of the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles does not cease or become more conventional within these quasi-historical contexts. While a smaller number of resistant figures may be observed, the approbation they receive from other characters and from their gods clearly indicates Bujold's estimation of these unconventional ideals for readers. The outward conformity of characters to traditional social roles is more closely observed in these novels, however Bujold's careful addition of psychological insight and intimate perspectives provides readers with a unique understanding of their behaviours. She capitalizes on the 'ambiguities, conflicts and paradoxes that distinguish and differentiate women from men and from ourselves, […] by articulating the various, interwoven strands of a tension, a condition of contradictions, that for the time being, at least, will not be reconciled' (de Lauretis 1986: 15). Through the narrative form of her novels, Bujold is able to criticize these roles, and the societies that impose them, by revealing the ambiguous and paradoxical space that exists between the inner self and the outward show of identity.

While the villainous Princess Joen or the sorcerous priestess Learned Hallana may seem to conform to stereotypical tropes, the readers' experience of their actions and thoughts provide a number of direct resistances to this ideation. Joen and Hallana provide dramatic renovations of mothers as women

with authority in, respectively, *Paladin of Souls* and *The Hallowed Hunt*. Bujold has discussed her resistance of the maternal stereotype:

> Women do desperately need models for power other than the maternal. […] We need a third place to stand. […] Ista, certainly, is looking for another place to stand; being neither maid nor matron nor crone, there is no slot in the standard women's-lives-grid her culture supplies that fits her. So she has to break out through the walls of the box. (qtd Oak 2009)

Without devaluing maternal skills or care, Bujold resists the unspoken conventions that insist that these are a woman's *main* or *only* access to authority. She invests political, social and economic power in female characters that allows them to move beyond the limited range of traditional expectations. This is largely done by attaching masculine traits or social roles to them; for example with Ista, Hallana and Joen, where traditionally masculine rights, such as freedom of movement, economic independence and the autonomy to make decisions both personal and political, are appropriated by female figures.

One of the most interesting role-reversals in *Paladin of Souls* is that of the Sleeping Beauty topos that occurs between Ista and Illvin. Illvin is rendered insensate by a demon and forced to redirect his life energy to his recently deceased brother, Arhys. Arhys' wife has enacted the sorcery (against social strictures) in order to prolong the life of her beloved at the expense of Illvin's; she permits Illvin a brief period of lucidity each day in which to eat and preserve his strength so as to better support Arhys. Ista appears in the role of the heroic rescuing prince in this version of the tale, her god redirecting Illvin's prayers for rescue to Ista and providing her with the necessary supernatural abilities to untangle the events at Castle Porifors. The parallel is referenced directly in the hopes of Illvin's servant who asks Ista to kiss Illvin to wake him up. Ista considers this request carefully, as she has dreamed of Illvin and conversed with him:

> The memory of the Bastard's second kiss heated her face. What if it had not been an unholy jest, but another gift – one meant to be passed along? Might it be granted to her to perform a miracle of healing, as agreeably as this? *So are the saints seduced by their gods.* Her heart thumped in concealed excitement. *A life for a life, and by the grace of the Bastard, my sin is lifted.* (Bujold 2003: 239)

Such simple remedies are not effective in Bujold's complex worlds, however, as the reality of Illvin's situation is far more complicated and Arhys does not survive its resolution. Nevertheless, the imagery remains.

This reversal of conventional positions between male and female partners is reinforced in the conclusion to the novel. For example when dy Baocia, Ista's brother, inquires of Foix dy Gura, 'Do I have you to thank, young man, for the

rescue of my sister?' Foix replies truthfully, 'No, Provincar […] She rescued me' (Bujold 2003: 544). And when Ista forms her travelling band of demon hunters, instead of deferring to Illvin and becoming his wife, she offers him the role of her 'royal seneschal: a competent and experienced officer, preferably one who knows this area, to direct my travels and secure my person' (567). The offer is clearly made in order to keep him by her side but no mention of a formal social arrangement, such as marriage, is made. Similarly, in *The Curse of Chalion*, Iselle arranges her own marriage contract through Cazaril without giving up any of the royal authority she holds in her own right; she then presents Cazaril to her handmaiden, Betriz, as a reward for her steadfast support during terrible times. Unlike traditionally gendered romantic pairings, Ista and Iselle have the guiding hand in their relationships and maintain their authority; Ista's power, in particular, is clearly held separate through the agency provided by her god. Illvin is Ista's 'Right-hand man' (Crosby 2003: 134) and convincingly displays acceptance of the strengths and abilities of his lover. The power balance in these relationships is ambiguous, approaching a more realistic depiction of primary world relationships rather than reiterating the simplistic binaries implicit in the tropes of gender representation usually presented in speculative fiction.

Bujold's habit of using 'characteristically damaged' or 'typically wounded' male characters (Nicholls and Tringham 2014) becomes an interesting element of this reversal. A Bujoldian 'Right-hand man' is usually socially disadvantaged, physically vulnerable, highly moral, intelligent, and emotionally aware enough to value and accept females who are not limited by traditional expectations. In the *Vorgosian* novels, Aral is bisexual in a patriarchal culture while his sons Miles and Mark both lack the physical perfection embraced on their home planet. In the novels under study here, Illvin is resurrected from the dead while Arhys is literally the walking dead; Cazaril is physically ruined by a long period of enslavement and suffers from a supposed tumour of the gut, while Ingrey shares his physical body with the spirit of a wolf, a much frowned-upon state in the Weald. As Kelso notes, 'if Bujold humanizes, she does not idealize' (Kelso 2009: 51). These damaged men carry both the elements of difference needed to critique hegemonic masculinities and the deviation from culturally normative roles to accept (equally divergent) powerful women on their own terms. By acknowledging the variation of the masculine from the limiting stereotype, Bujold opens up a space for feminine variations to be created and examined as well.

When questioned about the feminist agenda that some attribute to her works, Bujold replies that 'in fact my work is driven by another agenda, a personal and psychological pursuit of an ongoing theme, personal identity, which sometimes but only sometimes intersects with feminism. […] Explorations of identity formation intersect problems of feminism in many areas […] It's valid to say […] that I incorporate many feminist concerns. […] Why not view both masculinism and feminism as part of the accumulation, instead of one as the necessary annihilator of the other?' (qtd Kelso 2009: 102–3). In her narratives

she pursues this goal with vigour, challenging gender norms as a whole by interpolating the normative features of both traditional masculine and feminine tropes in her construction of characters, resisting and responding to the often predictable frameworks of the generic structures common to sf and fantasy. Cranny-Francis has remarked that 'Fantasy can reveal that truth, that there is no neutral, objective, natural, commonsense position or perspective because of its overt play with the conventions with which we define and describe the real, conventions which are themselves constructed by particular discourses' (Cranny-Francis 1990: 78). The playfulness which Bujold engages with in her depictions of gender roles allows Bujold to renovate the gendered representation of characters in speculative fictions.

Anne Bishop: substituting political authority

Bishop's representation of gender roles also makes use of unusual subjectivities as social critique. However, rather than revealing the limitations of dominant cultural mores through the subject position of infrequently acknowledged individuals (such as women and other races), Bishop chooses to place male characters into narrative roles usually occupied by women and, through this reversal, to examine the socially constructed nature of gender.

The psycho-sexual tension of early pulp sf that usually presented matriarchal rule and single-sex communities as inimical to the male is harnessed by Bishop to underscore how traditional, hierarchical political systems are inimical to the female. Pamela Sargent describes this earlier era of fiction as 'more a reflection of the fears or wishes of the author than serious extrapolation' (1978: 40). But the knowledge that these political systems are largely still in place in the primary world creates further dialectical tension where these structures of social organization can be critiqued. While pulp sf often engaged with matriarchy as a dystopian social order with which to underline the advantages of normative patriarchal authority, the feminist fictions of the 1970s onwards began to use such matriarchies as a critique of established power structures. For example, the single-sex worlds of Sargent's *The Shore of Women* and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (both 1986) adapted the trope to present these societies as feminist utopias rather than dystopias. Peter Fitting has noted of this era of feminist speculation, 'it was easier to imagine an end to the sex/gender system by eliminating men than to try and "rewrite" them' (Fitting 1987: 108). However, others began 'reinventing female and male identities and interactions' (Attebery 2002: 107). If Bujold is expanding on these patterns by integrating men and women into a single society where humans share gender characteristics, Bishop is showing us a range of societies who have engaged with the distribution of authority and sexuality in markedly different ways *without altering* underlying essentialist or binary constructions of gender.

This is not always a comfortable process, there are significant challenges to normative sexual codes represented within the texts and problematic

examinations of gendered behaviour, but it is a singular kind of thought experiment which exposes the 'ideological mechanism' of the 'dominant discursive formation' through which 'conservative ideological discourses (of gender, class, race) are encoded into our consciousness' (Cranny-Francis 1990: 13–14). By reversing the standards of aggression and authority in one nation (Terrielle), and reproducing extant standards in another (Little Terrielle), Bishop is able to lead readers to her vision (Kaeleer) of how balance and unity might be achieved without abandoning or significantly re-ordering established gender patterns. The distance between the established order of the primary world and the desired alteration presented in the secondary is bridged by a less overwhelming shift in social expectation of behaviour, rather than revising long-established social constructions of gender as presented by Bujold.

Sargent described this aspiration in *Women of Wonder* (1974): 'Science Fiction can provide women with possible scenarios for their own future development. Other literature can show us women imprisoned by attitudes toward them, at odds with what is expected of them, or making the best of their situation in present or past societies. […] *Only sf and fantasy literature can show us women in entirely new or strange surroundings*' (Sargent 1978: 48). But rather than limiting herself to two oppositional states of dystopia and utopia and the 'movement between two states – of a constraining patriarchal world and another one' (Lefanu 1988: 31), Bishop offers three; a matriarchal, as well as a patriarchal dystopia, set beside a more harmonious mixed gender system where the familiar expectations of each gender are recognized and valued. Attebery has suggested that, 'the most positive visions of society are those in which women and men are similarly free to defy norms' (Attebery 2002: 128). As in Bujold's narratives, the route to this harmony is framed by Bishop as a reward for self-realization, where all characters seek a social role that suits their unique identity and skills, a state often characterized by romantic attachment with an equal partner as well.

Social hierarchies are represented in these worlds by the darkness of the jewel that a person carries, which is a sign of how much magical energy they may access. At puberty all jewelled people make an Offering to the Dark, during which their jewels are usually made darker (and therefore more powerful). This supernatural agency is supported by a political system where women are prioritized as the highest authority of monarchic rule, assisted by powerful males in subordinate roles as protectors and warriors in much the same ways as Elizabeth I reordered the social expectations during her time as queen of England. Here, women retain economic as well as political autonomy, for males inherit neither their partners' property nor their political roles upon marriage. The monarchic structure is, in turn, supported by a theocratic model of government, heavily reliant on High Priestesses in key roles and the agency of the jewels is clearly tied to an ancestral worship of a dragon-goddess figure. The corruption of this ancient system by an ambitious priestess, Dorothea, forms the crux of

the narrative arc. Resisting and ultimately replacing this priestess is the goal of the protagonists and is not resolved until the final of the first three novels in the series. Other novels explore the continuing rehabilitation of the remaining nations and some touch on early stages of this corruption.

Dorothea uses familiar tools of oppression and torture to rule by fear instead of by right. This torture is usually presented in a highly sexualized form; prime males are forced into sexual slavery and wear cock rings which can be used to cause pain in order to control them. Otherwise, they are thrown into literal slavery (such as salt mines) or castrated as punishment, and young females are frequently raped on the instructions of Dorothea or her underling in order to prevent them reaching their full magical potential. Bishop also has a keen eye for the consequences on ordinary people as part of the social fabric, including financial corruption and everyday abuse of all kinds of power. When Dorothea orders the removal of potential threats, the males who have taken over rulership of Little Terrielle use the 'breaking' via rape of family members or of those who seek to rebel as a method of control. They are shown mimicking her style of government but the arguments for patriarchal authority are presented as new and a radical shift from the former matriarchal government.

Although the common cultural understandings of men as violent, aggressive and physical beings are maintained, the first-person masculine description of rape reverses old sexual tropes. For example, despite Daemon's reputation as a dangerous seducer, he is a sex slave 'lent' by Dorothea to those brave or crazy enough to try. He is, however, impotent because of his 'ring of obedience' and refuses to have penetrative sex with the women he is forced to service, complicating the typical representation of masculine prowess in pulp sf. His half-brother, Lucivar, is shown as highly resistant to his domination by tyrants (for example, he castrates the Queen of Pruul with his teeth while being forced to perform oral sex) but readily accepts the rightful and more gender-balanced rule of Jaenelle when she takes the throne of Kaeleer. Sexual activity is hardly ever shown in either of the Terrielles as romantic or bonding but as the exertion of one person's will over another. The struggle for dominance is clearly framed as the only way to achieve autonomy or any measure of self-possession, and the corruption is so endemic that domination or manipulation of others becomes the primary method of exercising free will.

As Attebery notes, 'Utopias are, among other things, filtering mechanisms. They filter out anything incompatible with the author's intention: everything that might adulterate the prescription or weaken the warning. […] Among them are female agency, kinship ties, links with nature, freedom of movement, freedom of conscience, diversity among women's personalities, noncompetitive sexuality, female desire, childbearing, and social change' (Attebery 2002: 121). In Kaeleer, these adulterations are instead emphasized and appear frequently. During the second and third novels of the series, Kaeleer becomes a refuge for those seeking relief from Dorothea, and a home to a range of magical races and

animals who seek out Jaenelle's kingdom as a model of diversity and tolerance. The ideals of self-determination, realization of personal identity, harmony and romance are extended to many sentient creatures, from winged humanoids to elves, witches, vampires, unicorns, giant telepathic tigers and lapdogs. Breeding between races rarely occurs but when it does the level of romantic attachment between the parents often determines the future happiness of the offspring; which is to say, it is usually managed well in Kaeleer but rarely anywhere else.

Sexual activity exists in a variety of forms; descriptions of bondage and domination abound, including the extension of submissive behaviour into romantic couplings. Lucivar's race, the Eyriens, undergo a recurring period of 'rut', a mating response where excessively violent and aggressive behaviour is only calmed by vigorous sex or extreme physical activity. When in captivity this behaviour is used to justify further suppression of the race, but in 'the wild', living free in Kaeleer, this is shown as a potentially dangerous but regular (and enjoyable) aspect of married life. Jaenelle's curious genetic heritage means that she also undergoes a similar experience, one that is only cured by a dangerous combat-cum-hunt scene with Lucivar. Anything is possible as long as the basic precepts of communion and emotional attachment are met; even, in *Queen of the Darkness* (2001), successful relationships between live humans and dead lords of the underworld. Although sex exists in other forms (prostitution for example) the significant binary of sex for romantic intimacy and sex as an expression of authority (rape) remains prominent. The few examples of sexual friendship shown are still enacted as moments of emotional (if not romantic) intimacy by the same character, Surreal, who engages in prostitution as a side-business to being an assassin, and who has already been established as able to separate love and affection from her work.

Perhaps the most awkward example of alternative sexuality presented in these novels, however, is the long-standing romantic attachment between Jaenelle and Daemon. When they first meet Jaenelle is a young girl and Daemon a mature male, and both are scarred from their experiences as sexual objects. Despite the disparity in their ages, much effort is made to explain this away via Daemon's extremely long life-span as a member of the Dhemlan race. Jaenelle's birth has long been prophesied, and Daemon's desire to resist Dorothea and return to older systems of governance consolidate on this prophecy, leading him to form a romantic bond with the *idea* of the Witch (as the prophecy names Jaenelle) before he ever meets her. Finding her as a small abused child is a shock but one that is overcome with patient waiting. Likewise, despite his nickname of 'the Sadist' (a partial pun on his surname, SaDiablo) and his oft-mentioned tendency towards sexual violence, his relationship with Jaenelle is uncharacteristically gentle. It takes them both some time to adjust to the knowledge that each of them is strong enough to bear the sexual aggression of the other. Daemon has established a pattern of resisting the burden of slavery by killing and tormenting the women who use him no matter what the

consequences, usually through extreme arousal and pain without the release of orgasm. This combination of extreme sexual behaviours and Jaenelle's age in the first two novels are highly disconcerting but the resolution of this dilemma through patience and love reveals Bishop's underlying concern for parity and romantic attachment in sexual relations. Despite the confronting nature of much of the sexual behaviour described, Bishop's work is a clear example of 'fantasy's ability to interrogate pleasure, sexuality, and identity in our society through the exploration of alternate realms, adapting conventions from other genres, such as romance, without being confined to type' (Crosby 2003: 142).

Jacqueline Carey: social reconstruction
The most immediate difference between the works of Bishop and Carey is the focused intervention of the gods in the sexual lives of the characters. While Bishop's worlds belong more to the tradition of High Fantasy that is medieval in tone but clearly divorced from the primary world, both Bujold and Carey's worlds carry echoes of real kingdoms, albeit with the introduction of supernatural forces. Carey's world is more clearly French-influenced than the Spanish and Germanic style worlds Bujold creates.

The story of Jesus and the Twelve Apostles is reframed by Carey as the tale of Elua and his Companions. Their travels are shifted to encompass a very lightly adapted European geography where other nations and cultures are analogous to the primary world, such as the Isle of Alba whose populace is very Celtic and tribal, or the Caerdicci Unitas which is highly Italianate. The Companions are described as angels following their demi-deity on his investigation of the mortal realm. One of these Companions is Naamah who sells her body in order to buy food and shelter for Elua and the others, and who is afterward revered as the patron saint of the Night Court: the Thirteen Houses of prostitutes, each House shading a different interpretation of her behaviour as a defining feature of their activities and specialities. The women and men who serve in the Thirteen Houses of the capital are respected and socially accepted, although they do still tend to associate mainly with members of other Houses rather than the general populace. As with Kaeleer's government, there are religious overtones to this social role due to the deification of Elua, and the nobility of the D'Angeline people who claim the Companions as ancestors.

This emphasis is foregrounded by the ability of the protagonist, Phaedre, to transform extreme pain into sexual pleasure, which is indicated by the distinctive blood mote in her eye, known as Kushiel's Dart after one of Elua's Companions, patron of submissive and penitential punishment. Sexual desire and the extremity of her abilities to withstand and even enjoy pain lend themselves to the frequent appearance of bondage and domination in the series. In speculative fiction female characters are often given supernatural abilities; however, 'these are often innate abilities which cannot be developed or controlled' (Russ 1973: 83). Here, Carey uses Phaedre's ability to examine the relationship between

her sexuality and her identity as a whole.

Phaedre is blessed by the gods with a talent for which others will pay or place themselves in her service. But as the trilogy continues, Phaedre retreats from this relationship into more individual and complex ones, especially when she adopts the son of her greatest enemy and forms a romantic pair with Joscelin, a lapsed Cassiline (an order of warriors devoted to service and celibacy in the name of another of Elua's Companions). However, she does not abandon her role as an *anguisette*, which is laid out in the earliest passages of her childhood that drive her into danger and to seeking physical punishments. These desires strain her romance with Joscelin when he cannot provide her with what she craves and seeks elsewhere. While the idea of a female character who gains pleasure from bondage and pain appears to be a male-oriented fantasy, the acknowledgement of a varied sexual appetite in a woman surrounded by, but increasingly independent of, males is an unusual element, even if she occupies the traditionally submissive role in these encounters.

Elua's precept to '*Love as thou wilt*' (Carey 2002: 7) not only provides the freedom for characters to pursue their desires without shame but also broadens the range of activities and combinations that are tolerated and even openly accepted by D'Angeline society. These changes are represented by the Thirteen Houses, within which prostitutes become a social necessity and acceptable rather than shameful, as sexual behaviour itself becomes a religious observance as much as an act undertaken for self-indulgence or procreation. Although the Thirteen Houses are highly expensive, and beyond the reach of lower-caste characters, their values permeate the rest of society through the adherence of the people to the state religion.

Individual sexuality, likewise, becomes an aspect of personality and mutable rather than fixed; customers approach the Houses according to temporary need rather than binaries such as hetero- and homosexual. The frequency with which males are mentioned as members of the Night Court and the range of activities in which they engage further contrast real-world values that bind together masculinity and dominance in fixed opposition to femininity and submission. As Crosby suggests, such variation in sexual expression, which 'portrays women (and men) as capable of a range of sexual behaviours, including superficial lust, promiscuity, friendly liaisons, partnerships, and life-bonded pairings' (Crosby 2003: 129), resists hegemonic constructions of gendered sexualities. Despite Phaedre's central role as a sexual object and her gender, which might lead one to assume that conformist associations will be preserved, the sheer volume and range of sexual encounters depicted resists the imposition of standardized cultural values. At the very least it defies the rigidity of many stereotyped understandings of sexual behaviour, with the inclusion of extreme bondage, dominance and submission, but also joyful and successful open relationships, as well as transitory ones.

The Thirteen Houses emphasize diversity and acceptance of others' sexual

habits as a necessity, so that the prejudices shown by characters are swiftly condemned as either not adhering to Elua's key precept of universal love, or as a hypocritical lack of self-acceptance, which also goes against the same primary tenet of the D'Angeline faith. Acceptance of the self's desires and validation of their acceptability places this consideration of sexual behaviour at the core of a discussion about identity. Carey makes it clear that what characters desire is not as important as their right to do so, whatever their gender. The duality of prostitution as both a religious and physical act, despite or *because* of the tone of service in which it is rendered, provides a challenging reformulation of its social role.

In addition, there is the consideration of pain as a source of identity-formation. Sexualized pain becomes an almost liturgical act of self-discovery. Phaedre, in particular, gains many key insights about her partners and/or herself during sexual encounters. Sometimes she trades her services for access to a person, such as the Mahrkgir in *Kushiel's Avatar* (2004); or for knowledge and safety when a hostage in *Kushiel's Chosen* (2003); or for safe passage in *Kushiel's Dart* (2002); and sometimes for personal reasons such as curiosity, desire and love. A prophecy is made about Phaedre early in the series, 'That which yields, is not always weak' (Carey 2002: 222) and this closely anticipates the struggles Phaedre faces between granting another person control of her body and the political intrigues in which she becomes entangled. Although she is often presented as an objectified slave (and sometimes is truly a prisoner), Phaedre nevertheless retains a remarkable degree of agency and autonomy. Her well-honed skills of observation and intelligence gathering, as well as her native intellect, combine with the first-person narration to oppose Phaedre's representation as a passive pleasure slave.

Although consent is a barely questioned prerogative in Bujold's works, prostitution is not criticized in and of itself, merely critiqued when it acts as thinly-veiled slavery. In both Bishop's work and Carey's, the often blurred line between consent and true freedom to choose sexual activity is explored through a prostitute character who also engages in spying or assassination. While Phaedre is susceptible to the incontestable will of her god, Bishop's Surreal is a more pragmatic example of the type. Although both Phaedre and Surreal are born into impoverished circumstances, Phaedre's uniqueness elevates her to a much higher social standing while Surreal experiences prostitution more as survival, from which she quickly branches out into assassination as a profitable sideline. Phaedre's sexuality and occupation remain central to the plot despite her accumulation of a child and a husband, whereas Surreal explores her sexuality increasingly distantly from her old career, asserting her independence and her right to consent through a range of transitory relationships with other characters. Eventually, she too has a child and is married whereas Phaedre continues to practice as a Servant of Naamah, in part to satisfy her religious calling but also to satisfy her darker appetites.

Conclusion

The unusual sexual license which Ista displays in Bujold's narratives is matched by Surreal and Phaedre. Surreal appears to be a reflection of real-world expectations, where a lack of economic opportunity leads to a female character selling herself. This lends the character, though, a cynical perspective on the society through which she moves, which otherwise largely conforms to the primary world. Carey has reframed the society in which Phaedre moves in order to shift the focus of disapprobation from prostitution itself to how and why people engage in sex. A far broader range of sexual activities are accepted without judgment, while the taboos of bondage and domination are examined in detail. Rather than being condemned out of hand as deviations from normative behaviour, the potential for consensual interaction is modelled and examined, while not ignoring the likely events and consequences when these behaviours cease to function as sexual intimacies and slide into violence and degradation. By altering the social position of the characters, these authors provide a markedly different point of view from which the reader can consider their own social context.

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'If the Inside was the Outside': Gender, Heteronormativity and the Body in David Levithan's *Every Day*

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> I wake up. Immediately I have to figure out who I am. It's not just the body – opening my eyes and discovering whether the skin on my arm is light or dark, whether my hair is long or short, whether I'm fat or thin, boy or girl, scarred or smooth […] Every day I am someone else. I am myself – I know who I am myself – but I am also someone else. It has always been like this. (Levithan 2012: 1)

The opening lines of David Levithan's *Every Day* (2012) immediately pull the reader into the fascinating and disorienting existence of A, the sixteen-year-old protagonist who wakes up every morning to spend that day in one body, only to awaken the next morning inhabiting a different body. During the course of the novel and across the variety of young lives that A inhabits, A encounters Rihannon, a teenage girl. They forge a connection and fall in love. Drawing upon the transformative potential of the fantastic, Levithan uses A's extraordinary ability to explore the intersections between subjectivity and the gendered body and to interrogate traditional norms of masculinity, femininity and gender ontology. A and Rihannon's tentatively evolving relationship proposes intriguing possibilities for the reimagining and expansion of concepts of sexuality, difference and selfhood in literature for young people.

A has spent years occupying diverse people and asserts an ostensibly inclusive and fluid gender perspective: 'when it came to gender, I was both and neither' (Levithan 2012: 254). This apparently open-ended approach to gender expression and to wider issues of ontology and representation is supported by Levithan's device of manipulating sentence structure to avoid using relative pronouns during A's narration whenever A creates clauses to express or describe A. However, the apparent cognitive dissonance posed by the novel's opening paragraph – with its rupture of conventional links between personhood and the body inhabited by that person and the possibility of multiple personhood in one body – is undermined by the conventional rhetoric of binary systems for governing the permissible level of difference which is allowed to different bodies. The apparently supple and non-discriminatory tone of this opening paragraph is predicated on a reductionist approach to embodiment and how different bodies are positioned within regimes of pleasure, power and prejudice. Despite A's protestations of treating every individual body that A encounters in the same equal and non-judgmental manner, A utilizes and relies on hegemonic 'either/or' concepts for regulating gender codes such as difference, desirability, beauty, normality and abnormality: people are either light- or dark-skinned, fat or thin, scarred or smooth, a boy or a girl.

The organizing principle of heteronormativity and the normalization of heterosexuality have long been intertwined in modern Western society: 'Heteronormativity captures the processes through which social institutions and social policies act to reinforce the belief that human beings fall into the male/man and female/woman categories, which exist in order to fulfill complementary roles' (Crisp 2009: 335). In contrast, Judith Butler has argued that gender is a cultural construct which can be enacted differently in different contexts and that it is the reiteration of the performance of a gender script that creates the illusion of naturalness and fixedness. Hence gender is 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time, to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990: 43–4). Throughout the novel, A insists that A has never thought 'of myself as a boy or a girl – I never have. I would just think of myself as a boy or a girl for a day. It was like a different set of clothes' (Levithan 2012: 155). Although this statement intriguingly suggests that A is aware of the performative nature of masculinity and femininity, A's engagement with gender is still interpolated within the biases and pressures of heteronormative ideologies.

Many critics have explored the tensions between the emancipatory power of literature for young people, its potential for diversity, and the traditional ideological alignment of these narratives within didactic and heteronormative paradigms. As Seelinger Trites notes, the Young Adult (YA) novel 'allows for postmodern questions about authority, power, repression, and the nature of growth in ways that traditional *Bildungsromane* do not' (Trites 2000: 19), and this offers valuable opportunities to investigate the ethics of representation, and to promote a diverse range of identities and experiences for young readers to encounter and imaginatively engage with. In particular, traditional concepts of childhood innocence, the associated suppression of young people's sexualities and any desires perceived as deviant, and the adult need to preserve this assumed triumvirate of young people's psychic, bodily and cultural purity have been interrogated and problematized. As Tison Pugh has observed, the 'conflicted gesture – of purging sexuality from a text to preserve children's innocence while nonetheless depicting some form of heterosexuality as childhood's desire end – reveals the queer foundations of children's literature' (Pugh 2011: 2). After surveying the presence and representation of different gender expressions during the last three decades of YA fiction, Corrine Wickens optimistically proposed that a 'shift toward more progressive inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) characters began in the late 1990s, highlighting some of the sociocultural shifts toward acceptance of LGBTQ individuals' has gradually been occurring' (Wickens 2011: 149). However, I agree with Lee Edelman's conclusion that an ideology of 'reproductive futurism' still underpins the vast majority of literature for teenagers, including 'gay adolescent novels', and that this doctrine strives to preserve 'the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the

political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations' (Edelman 2004: 2).

Through his emphasis on the importance of diversity and his promotion of an inclusive range of gender expressions, Levithan seeks to challenge the nexus of social pressures, expectations and judgments about teenage desire, sexuality and embodiment. Levithan's fiction is notable for its sophisticated investigation of and sensitivity towards LGBT and diversity issues for teenage readers. An insistence on not representing LGBT characters and themes as a platform for a didactic 'issue novel' is central to Levithan's narrative politics. A claims early on that 'I will never define myself in terms of anyone else. I will never feel the pressure of peers or the burden of parental expectation. I can view everyone as pieces of a whole, and focus on the whole, not the pieces' (Levithan 2012: 7). However as A's romance with Rihannon progresses, A is forced to revise A's initially naive presumption of an autonomy which transcends the regulations and codes that shape other people's corporeal lives. A gradually develops a more humble and reflective understanding of the individuality and complexity of each of the people that A occupies, finally recognizing that 'By seeing the world from so many angles, I get more of a sense of its dimensionality' (107).

In his acclaimed novel, *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), Levithan created a community which joyfully unites all genders and sexualities without prejudice, hierarchies or division: 'There really isn't a gay scene or a straight scene in our town. They got all mixed up a while back, which I think is for the best' (Levithan 2003: 1). Many critics have praised Levithan's skilful narrative strategies and their capacity to support a more expansive, inclusive and inquisitive reading experience. Wickens argues that 'through the novel's blurred genres and inventive use of linguistic features, *Boy Meets Boy* is able to more effectively undermine heteronormative assumptions by presenting the unthinkable: children as sexual beings, hegemonic masculinity as in fact nonhegemonic and detrimental to success, and homosexuality as normalized and even ordinary' (Wickens 2011: 148). Moreover, Amy Pattee claims that 'Levithan sets *Boy Meets Boy* in a utopian town in which gay and transgendered students are accepted and celebrated and strict boundaries of traditional gender expression have dissolved; through this use of setting, the author effectively subverts the paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality in young adult fiction in general and young adult romance, specifically' (Pattee 2009: 156). One scene in the novel especially demonstrates the limiting and disempowering consequences of traditional terminology and concepts around sexual orientations. The narrator and his best friend, Kyle, are discussing Kyle's unhappiness with and potential resistance to being confined and judged according to conventional heteronormative regimes:

> 'I'm so confused. [...] I still like girls. [...] And I also like guys.[...] But I wanted to be one or the other. [...] But every time I'm with one, I think the other's possible.'

> 'So you're bisexual.'
>
> Kyle's face flushes. 'I hate that word. [...] It makes me sound like I'm divided.'
>
> 'When really you're doubled?'
>
> 'Right-O.'
>
> […]
>
> 'We could call you an ambisexual. A duosexual. A—'
>
> 'Do I really have to find a word for it?' Kyle interrupts. 'Can't it just be what it is?'
>
> 'Of course,' I say, even though in the bigger world I'm not so sure. The world loves stupid labels. I wish we got to choose our own.'
>
> (Levithan 2003: 85–6)

Although Levithan seems to present a compelling case for a welcome questioning and reconfiguration of gender expressions, the novel still frames these conversations within regimes of naturalized norms and associated perceptions of anything difference as abnormal. Even gay and queer characters are represented as inevitably compelled to use and rely on labels, even if these epithets are of their own choosing, in order to perform the tacitly necessary work of classifying and regulating people. Despite the novel's apparently utopian tone and its optimistic ending demonstrating characters' capacity for confronting and overcoming homophobic prejudice, I ultimately agree with Thomas Crisp's argument that 'while Levithan does indeed "flip" the binary in *Boy Meets Boy*, in many ways, he simply shows the other side. He repositions the world to bring the inside-out and the outside-in, but "out" and "in" values persist and ultimately leave the binary intact […] This is not enough: to truly disrupt heteronormativity, literature would have to be imagined beyond identity categories' (Crisp 2009: 343).

Every Day constitutes Levithan's most ambitious endeavour to date – and arguably one of literature for teenagers – to attempt to 'imagine beyond identity categories'. Through A's tantalizing capacity for gender mobility and transformation, *Every Day* interrogates even further the potential for dissolving regulatory concepts that police hegemonic gender systems such as gay or straight. A significant number of the bodies that A inhabits are homosexual, lesbian and transgender and there are many cissexual and transgender characters who act as friends and relatives in the everyday lives of A's hosts. A is particularly impressed by the pleasures and challenges of resisting conservative gender binaries while inhabiting the body of Vic who is 'biologically female, gendered male' (Levithan 2012: 253). Although Rihannon's traditional hegemonic attitudes are mystified by this anomaly, stating that 'I don't even know what that means' (257), A shares an affinity with Vic who lives 'within the definition of his own truth, just like me. He knows who he wants to be. Most people our age don't have to do that. They stay within the realm of the easy'

(253). Considering the ideological omission and often explicit erasure of gay, queer and transgender characters even in contemporary fiction for teenagers, *Every Day* represents and advocates for an admirable range of sexualities and gender expressions.

Levithan's emphasis on the ongoing process of the construction and performance of gendered identity problematizes many of the ideological and easy assumptions of the heteronormative romance plot which dominates much YA fiction. Rihannon's variously non-sexual and sexual encounters with A's different physical incarnations – male, female, heterosexual, gay, lesbian, queer and transgender — pose a provocative dilemma for the romance genre's expectation and almost mandate of reciprocal monogamy by its protagonists. After all, what constitutes fidelity and what counts as cheating when she is engaging in various intimate acts with a partner who is continuously present albeit operating in different bodies in these different moments? Rihannon and A must negotiate and confront uncomfortable blurrings and transgressions of the boundaries which police normative constructions of natural and unnatural embodiment.

When A finally confides in Rihannon and tells her the secret of A's migration from body to body, A predicts that she would react 'in two ways: revelation or revulsion' (95). Significantly, the three greatest tests for A and Rihannon's reciprocal ability to respond to and desire each other all involve extreme corporeal reality: firstly, when A occupies Ashley, a 'superhot black girl' (150) who looks like Beyoncé; secondly, when A wakes up inside Rihannon's body; and thirdly, when A inhabits the body of an obese teenager. In the first instance, A feels alienated and rendered untouchable by the force of Ashley's gorgeousness. Meanwhile Rihannon is paralysed by Ashley's superior embodiment of female beauty as well as by her own heterosexual anxieties. Initially stating that 'I think my imagination needs a little more time to catch up to the situation' (150), she struggles with being positioned within a lesbian relationship and is noticeably 'less affectionate' (225) with A when s/he occupies this formidable female body. Interestingly, in contrast to multiple times when A has been involved in a male gay relationship, this is one of only two times that A attempts to pursue and sustain an explicitly romantic and (at least from A's expectations) a sexually active relationship while female with Rihannon or with any other girl.

Caroline Jones, noting the relative elision of lesbian narratives and the representation of queer female desire within young-adult literature, argues that far too many '"traditional" and "mediating" texts introduce and attempt to "normalize" lesbian identity, but essentially fail to acknowledge, explore, or advocate for lesbian identity or desire.' Instead, they merely 'address the nonlesbian reader's curiosity about the lesbian Other' (Jones 2013: 79) rather than authentically engaging with these identities. This pattern holds true in *Every Day* as Levithan deflects any chance of A and Rihannon engaging in lesbian sexual activity as well as evading a deeper exploration of the potential

subversiveness and complexities of lesbian desire. Instead, he displaces the rationale for any discomfort or ambivalence felt by the characters or the reader onto the widely-agreed 'untouchable' power (Levithan 2012: 151) of this body's beauty which would typically overwhelm anyone, whether heterosexual, gay, queer or asexual. Rihannon is thus presented as performing an ostensibly normal failure of imagination in this difficult situation since A's appearance is 'too much. You're too perfect right now. I can't imagine being with someone like […] you[…]. I can't see beyond her, okay?' (153).

The second situation juxtaposes comedy and horror as A attempts to navigate a day within Rihannon's body without immeasurably damaging the delicate equilibrium of trust in their emergent romance. This fantastical shared physical communion is foreshadowed earlier in the novel when A and Rihannon trade stories that no one else knows about them. They each choose to share a story embedded in a moment of physical development, curiosity and a desire to move past the proscribed innocence of childhood into a supposedly more adult and illicit experience of bodily self-awareness and sexual self-expression. Rihannon describes how she secretly and unsuccessfully tried to pierce her own ears when she was ten and A recounts reading Judy Blume's novel, *Forever* (1975), at eight years old and thinking that 'it was unfair that the boy would name his, um, organ, and the girl wouldn't name hers. So I decided to give mine a name' (Levithan 2012: 60). While inhabiting Rihannon's body, A explicitly refuses the temptation of a similar kind of naming or knowledge of Rihannon's private parts and is desperate not to 'take any advantage' or 'peek' (188) at any part of Rihannon's naked form. Despite these efforts, A is overwhelmed by the relentless overload of sensation from uniquely knowing and feeling the world from the inside of Rihannon's body: 'To experience her body's balance within the world, the sensation of her skin from the inside, touching her face and receiving the touch from both sides – it's unavoidable and incredibly intense' (190). To A's great relief, Rihannon miraculously does not feel threatened or violated by this uncanny incident and instead she discovers that she has come to know and understand A more through this experience while A was so intimately inside her body: 'I didn't feel like I'd missed a day. It was like I woke up and something had been […] added' (202).

Levithan portrays this alienating and potentially abhorrent situation with narrative elegance and tact as the narrative voice slips between first-person singular and first-person plural with the merging of A's and Rihannon's perspectives, and intriguingly extends this delicacy of tone whenever there is any act of sexual intimacy between A and Rihannon. Although readers might reasonably expect at least some physical details regarding characters' bodies to be supplied in a novel for teenagers which chronicles multiple romantic and erotic encounters by an entity that occupies a new body every day, Levithan never provides any information about his characters' sexual interactions or examples of their sexual curiosity, whether LGBTQ or heterosexual. When A climbs a mountain while occupying Rihannon's body, symbolic intercourse is

suggested to have taken place through their intertwined physical feelings of sweating, exertion and pleasure. Likewise, A and Rihannon's love-making later in the novel is presented indirectly and quite lyrically: 'This is what we look like when we are completely open to each other. This is where we go when we no longer want to hide' (228).

This seemingly tasteful decision not to acknowledge or represent adolescent sexual expression takes on a more ominous aspect in light of Western societal discomfort and normalizing processes of surveillance and repression regarding young people's sexual behavior and sexual knowledge. Trites has critiqued the cultural unease regarding adolescents' sexual lives and self-expression, noting that 'we live in a society that objectifies teen sexuality, at once glorifying and idealizing it while also stigmatizing and repressing it' (Trites 2000: 95). Levithan's discretion about anything constituting what Trites terms 'genital sexual contact', especially when enacted by the gender-fluid A, conveniently precludes the possibility of the novel being judged inappropriately graphic. Trites suggests that 'any gay YA novel as sexually explicit as, say, Blume's *Forever* would likely be labeled pornography' (Trites 1998: 50), and Levithan's approach seems more frustrating considering the explicit intertextual reference to Blume's novel which A makes and the significance the book played in A's emerging identity.

However, it is the third incident which threatens A and Rihannon's connection the most and which succeeds in thoroughly eclipsing any possibility of a romantic or erotic impulse. Although A and Rihannon are stymied by feelings of intimidation and unease in the first two scenarios, they manage to talk through and temporarily resolve their ambivalence. Yet both A and Rihannon find it impossible to overcome mutual feelings of disgust while A inhabits the body of the obese teenager, Finn Taylor. While A implores Rihannon not to 'look at the package. Look at what's inside' (Levithan 2012: 273), she is unable to raise any glimmer of romantic or even platonic feelings for A in this body, regardless of its sexual orientation. A is similarly alienated and repelled by A's affiliation with this body. When Rihannon admits that 'I can't see you inside. Usually I can. Some glimmer of you in the eyes. But not tonight', A 'in some way' feels 'flattered' and claims that it's 'okay. The reason you're not seeing it is because he's so unlike me. You're not feeling it because I'm not like this' (274). At no point is the obesity of the body that A is inhabiting specified as the reason for their aversion and neither Rihannon nor A is able to directly name the source of the abjection that they shrink from. Instead a conveniently opaque ellipsis is used which allows them to manage their repulsion:

> 'It's just an off night […]. We're allowed to have off nights, right? Especially considering….'
> > 'Yeah. Especially considering.' (275)

Despite A's criticism of others for being harshly judgmental about this particular host body, A succumbs to the same systems of prejudice, stigma and shaming

around allegedly ordinary and abnormal bodies and feels 'guilty about how relieved I am to be a normal size the next morning' (276). This judgmental approach and conservative repulsion from any bodily state that might be considered dangerously deviant or abject continues through the novel. According to Julia Kristeva, an abject force is that 'which disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva 1982: 4), and thus a threat to norms of decency and integrity through decay, infection and disease. A confidently tells Rihannon about the enlightenment that A gained from living one day in the life of a blind young girl: A 'learned more from being her for a day than I'd learn from most people over a year. It showed me how arbitrary and individual it is, the way we experience the world' (Levithan 2012: 231). Yet A does not manage, or even particularly try, to sustain this admirable philosophy about the richness of each person's individuality and diversity.

In contrast, A is alienated and repulsed by several bodies that A occupies during the novel, which are presented to the reader as dangerous because of their impure, abject and self-destructive states which inconveniently defy conventions of childhood purity and care-free innocence. The body of a teenage addict is described as a neuter and is never afforded any contextual or personal characteristics such as a name, a gender, a sexual orientation or an ethnicity. The pestilential force of this abject adolescent challenges even A's flexibility regarding reliable norms of bodily behaviour: 'the body makes me feel like it wants to defecate and vomit. First in the usual way. Then I feel I want to defecate through my mouth and vomit through the other end. Everything is being mangled' (63). Later in the novel, A inhabits the body of Kelsea, a girl preoccupied with plans for suicide. Despite feeling sympathy for Kelsea's isolation and distress, A sanctimoniously regards Kelsea as a toxic menace that must be policed in order to avoid contamination to other children and to the very concept of childhood psychic and physical innocence: 'I get off the seesaw, back away from the park. Because now I feel like I am the thing the parents are afraid of. I am the reality they want to avoid. No, not just avoid – *prevent*. They don't want me anywhere near their children, and I don't blame them. It feels as if everything I touch will turn to harm' (127).

While Levithan's work is committed to the investigation and reimagining of conservative norms, biases and hierarchies around sexualities and gender expressions, he disappointingly does not extend this advocacy for respect and acceptance of diversity to all experiences of bodily and gender expression. Although both Rihannon and A express strong dislike for what they consider to be the contrived and sentimental children's picture-book, *The Giving Tree* (1964), *Every Day* shares much ideologically with that story's message – 'Love means never having to lose your limbs' (Levithan 2012: 222) – and its attendant assumptions about the importance of the right kind of love and the correct kind of flawless embodiment. Regardless of the myriad of diverse perspectives in which A has resided, A ultimately perpetuates hegemonic assumptions regarding the importance of being able-bodied, healthy and suitably normal. The novel maintains and circulates conservative systems governing biases and

judgments of what constitutes desirable and unacceptable embodiment and what kind of person constitutes the right romantic partner. Rihannon eventually admits that she cannot continue her involvement with A since A 'is a different person every day' and that, despite her best efforts, she 'can't love every single person you are equally' (278). Even by the end of the novel, Rihannon still insists on maintaining hegemonic gender codes, conceptualizing A as both male and heterosexual and thus assuming that A's future romantic partners would automatically be female and straight: 'I want you to know, if you were a guy I met – if you were the same guy every day, if the inside was the outside – there's a good chance I could love you forever. […] There might be girls out there who could deal with it. I hope there are. But I'm not one of them. I just can't do it' (279). Likewise A presumptuously and conservatively decides that the best replacement romantic partner for Rihannon is a heterosexual male, Alexander, whom A presents to Rihannon as a *fait accompli* at the end of the novel, concluding that 'You'll find the things in him that you find in me […] Without the complications' (280).

Levithan's device of using the continuous present tense throughout the novel implies a promising sense of constant mobility and ongoing journey which mirrors A's relentless flow from one body to another. This narrative strategy reinforces the apparently unclassifiable status of A's fluid subjectivity and resistance to stereotypical compartmentalization. Yet A's difference is never comprehended or represented beyond the existing, normalizing frameworks of gender binaries and physical embodiment. I agree with Michelle Abate and Kenneth Kidd's proposal that 'understanding children's literature as queer means embracing trajectories and tonalities other than the lesbian/gay-affirmative and celebratory' (Abate and Kidd 2011: 9). Unfortunately, *Every Day* does not fulfil its potential to do so. In the end the novel succumbs to the pattern dominating contemporary YA fiction that Rebekah Wheadon has observed:

> If queer characters can never be written without pointing to their otherness, the very notion of inclusivity is troubled. […] As LGBTQ persons are become more socially accepted, they must also resist being normalized, as that normalization is a part of the same process that first othered queerness. The same can be said for YA: the attempt to resist a normalizing of queerness through heterosexuality is necessary. The tension, then, is two-fold: queerness must resist heteronormativity, a resistance that struggles against being tamed (normalized within heteronormativity) and being othered. (Wheadon 2012: 18–9)

The openness, progress and expansion within the novel's provocative premise are not actualized as Levithan ultimately maintains normative systems for defining and regulating identity in traditional and reactionary regimes of heteronormativity and body aesthetics. Even the covers of the UK and US editions of the novel indicate this presumption of heterosexual norms, heteronormative romance and normal adolescent bodies: the same two figures, one male and one female, both

presumably heterosexual appear on one cover while the posture, silhouettes and black and white colours of the two figures on the second cover suggest the conventional binary of a heterosexual couple. Despite the tantalizing possibilities raised by A's protean engagement with identity, gender expressions and embodiment, it seems that these complexities are still impossible to accommodate within the literary imagination of contemporary YA fiction.

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Making Gender Trouble in Early Queer SF: Samuel R. Delany's 'Aye, and Gomorrah'

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> Obviously, the political task is not to refuse representational politics – as if we could. The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field [...] the task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize. (Butler 2008: 7)

In 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1985), Donna Haraway names Samuel R. Delany among other feminist sf writers to whom she is indebted for her formulation of the cyborg as a post-gender political myth. It is a myth that is able to inform theories questioning gender essentialism and to critique the categories of identity that Judith Butler calls on queer theory to do. Delany and other writers of the New Wave like Ursula Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr., and Joanna Russ were among the first to write about the breakdown of the gender binary; to the point of very nearly creating a queer science fiction genre. They did this by imagining worlds where this binary either does not exist, or is made very problematic, thus helping to lay the groundwork for feminists and queer theorists like Butler and Haraway to expose gender as a 'regulatory fiction' (Butler 2008: 46).

Queer theory today could benefit from a deeper affiliation with and acknowledgment of these writers as Haraway has done. For example, in *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz cites Delany but focuses primarily on his non-sf writings. Although queer approaches have been made to science fiction that work to undo the stability of gender binaries, there has been little attention paid to how the genre contributed historically to queer theory's formation. When I first set out to write this article, I hypothesized that I could highlight an sf example of this historical contribution and show that the cyborg is always already queer, already an answer to power's production of gender as a mode of repression. Of course, this argument depends entirely upon what your definition of a cyborg is, and unfortunately Haraway's definition of the cyborg as a post-gender political myth is not the dominant one, a fact she acknowledges in later writings. One need only think of popular cyborgs like Robocop or the Borg to realize that, despite possible queer readings, cyborgs often 'sustain conventional gender categories', and that 'contra to much of the more optimistic literature on cyborgs […] the boundary territory or border where identity is contested is not always a happy place of delightful confusion' (Walton 2004: 35). To give a brief example, despite Robocop's hyper-masculinity, his reconstruction has led to an inability to reproduce or remember his family, thus associating the cyborg with a crisis of identity rather than 'delightful confusion'.

Further, the possibility of resisting the gender binary at its boundaries also depends on one's definition of the space cyborgs occupy: that is, the posthuman, which can be a liberatory or critical space at times, but is more often an analytical term which makes no critical judgments, and can at its worst be an 'opportunist brand […] developed in the contemporary market economy' (Braidotti 2013: 45). In the tradition of co-opting subversion at which capitalism is so adept, Braidotti also notes that 'advocates of advanced capitalism seem to be faster in grasping the creative potential of the posthuman than some of the well-meaning and progressive […] opponents of this system' (45). Without adopting what Braidotti terms a 'critical posthuman ethics' that recognizes and works to undermine power relations in our globalized system, posthumanism itself is an aid to power's production of gender, and the pop-culture cyborg is a part of this creative co-optation.

So if the posthuman cyborg is neither always already queer nor resistant to the hegemony, do iterations of the cyborg as queer still have a subversive power? Delany's 'Aye, and Gomorrah' (1966) engages this question by imagining gender-queer cyborgs, monsters created in the service of capital, whose indeterminate status relegates them to the margins of society. On the one hand, these cyborgs perform gender queerness in complex ways that 'make gender trouble' in the tradition of Butler and drag performance. But on the other hand, their performance is also one of feigning 'delightful confusion' in a way that complicates their potential and reifies the powers that created them. Even in a situation where cyborgs are definitely queer, Delany's story shows that cultural anxieties around gender can be perpetuated, and binaries reinforced. Thus the queer cyborg, as opposed to just the queer or just the cyborg, is a helpful way to think through subversion of power using the two lenses of queer and cyborg theories: primarily, in this case, Haraway's post-gender cyborg acting a variation of Butler's drag performance, as outlined in *Gender Trouble* (1990).

Butler and Haraway, along with Heather Walton's critique of cyborg theory, work together surprisingly well. Both Butler and Haraway have similar projects in that they wish to take their respective political fields – queer theory and socialist feminism – away from dualistic thinking around gender, while at the same time recognizing that their subject position, and by extension the subject position of their readers, is one that is not completely outside hegemonic power structures. Primarily they wish to do this because 'any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized' (Butler 2008: 17). Haraway takes this breakdown of the binary of mind and body as her project, alongside a deconstruction of gender binaries via the cyborg, in order to criticize the humanist values of second-wave feminisms.

To that end, both Butler and Haraway confirm Braidotti's critical posthumanist stance, which 'raises issues of power and entitlement in the age of globalization

and calls for self-reflexivity on the part of the subjects who occupy the former humanist centre, but also those who dwell in one of the many scattered centres of power of advanced post-modernity' (Braidotti 2013: 49). Braidotti is a useful addition to my study of queer cyborgs because of her anti-humanist stance against 'self-centered individualism' (48), which rejects Man's centrality in the world, along with its heteronormative desires and stable identities. Importantly for my study, Braidotti rejects the stable identity of nationhood, which Delany's cyborgs certainly do not have, and which they seem to struggle mightily with in their displacement.

Two Kinds of Queerness: Spacers and Frelks

'Aye, and Gomorrah' is a very short story, in which much background information goes unexplained; this, however, means it is rich ground for interpretation. Delany acknowledges as much in a 1994 afterword to the story, stating that he doesn't know exactly what the story is about, that it has likely changed its meaning with the changing times, and that today he would say it is probably 'somehow about the desire for desire' (Delany 1997: 204). Certainly, queer subversiveness is de-emphasized in this afterword, despite Delany's openness to new interpretations. Still, it is important to keep the idea of 'desire for desire' in mind for this analysis.

In ten pages, Delany follows a group of Spacers (one of whom is the unnamed narrator) on leave from their spacewalking work, which requires them to be neutered before puberty to avoid the side-effects of the radiation they are subjected to. This neutering leads to a pre-pubescent kind of androgyny and therefore an obvious challenge to our gender binary, but it is a managed challenge, as I will show. Landing on leave in Paris, Houston and Istanbul, these displaced cyborgs deal with both fetishization and rejection, causing them to act in juvenile ways. In every city they visit, they eventually hear the suggestion: 'don't you think that you […] people should leave?' In the final city, Istanbul, the narrator attempts to make money through prostitution, but is rejected. S/he returns to the other Spacers, who have had better luck, to continue their cycle of going up into space to work, and coming back down to wreak havoc on shore leave.

The instability and ambivalence of the Spacers' marginal cyborg situation – both geographic and gendered – is replete throughout the story. This is made clear to the reader by the fact that gendered nouns and pronouns between French and Spanish are different for their earthbound progenitors, the 'frelks', born with unspecified sexual irregularities but not chosen to undergo neutering to become Spacers. At the border with Texas, the narrator is told that a queer frelk is 'un frelko' while the French call them 'une frelk', inviting linguistic confusion over the arbitrary nature of gendered pronouns. As Haraway states, 'cyborg politics is the struggle for language' (2001: 2295), and the fact that Spacers are effectively unsettling the gendered instabilities between languages

shows the subversive potential of their displacement. This is the case whether the displaced person (perhaps in real life, a foreigner whose native language does not have gendered pronouns attempting to speak a local language like French or Spanish) is doing so intentionally or not. Language is important to Delany, and linguistic explorations are a hallmark of his work as a queer science fiction writer.

Importantly, the Spacers' work is coded as construction and other grunt work, so they are therefore not the sort of laudable, hyper-capable, hyper-masculine, family-oriented astronaut typical of the 1960s whom one would see on the cover of *TIME*, deserving of society's greatest praise as brave explorers. They are instead working class, expendable anti-heroes, and they act their rowdy part. Gillian Harkins points out that Spacers are 'capable of production but not reproduction' (2012: 1074), which makes them ideal members of an oppressed working class. Further, they are the exact opposite of hyper-masculine; even their space-army generals are depicted as 'smooth-faced' (Delany 1967: 457). Delany thus joins other New Wave artists like J.G. Ballard, Barry Malzberg and David Bowie in exploring the mad astronaut trope with a genderqueer twist, taking the displacement and alienation of astronauts to a new level.

The Spacers' class status works to render more acceptable their monstrous androgyny as their (lack of) sexuality is a literal product or side-effect of capitalism, rather than one born in a posthuman ethic. Delany's Spacers are a critique of capitalism both despite and because of their being birthed by it, and the historical situation of the story bears this out. Writing three years before the Stonewall riots, before being homosexual was a militant political identity, Delany invents a future that now reads like our history through a story primarily concerned with relations between Spacers and frelks. The latter both fetishize and idolize Spacers, and are therefore diagnosed with having a very Freudian-sounding 'Free-fall-sexual-displacement complex' (Delany 1967: 455), and so are as queer as Spacers are, though their queerness is of a different kind than the Spacers' neutering. The frelks are more sexually mature than Spacers, while their name is clearly analogous to 'freak', associating them with the '60s counterculture. Delany implies that in the intervening time – decades perhaps from 1966 – backlash against the sexual revolution has led to their marginalization and a retrenchment of power in global capitalism that, as Harkins argues, is eerily foretelling of the neoliberal age that would begin in the decades following the story's publication (Harkins 2012: 1074). The freaks of Delany's age were certainly marginalized and presented a queer critique of power (eventually criticized for being co-opted, consumerist and ultimately unsuccessful) that was just as ambivalent as the Spacers and their rebellious activities. This failure shows in the lightly mocking way that Delany depicts the main frelk in the story and in the Flower Passage, a sort of hippie market where frelks go to pick up Spacers.

Spacers as Neo-Cherubim and the Creation of Neo-Gomorrah

In order to look at the Spacer as a queer cyborg, I want to examine them in the spirit of the title's Biblical reference to Gomorrah. In its indeterminacy and marginality, the cyborg is a monster, one which has an affinity with – if not its root in – the pagan figure of the chimera, and more closely its Christian counterpart, the cherub. Monsters, of which cyborgs are a genotype, define boundaries, or according to Haraway, 'the limits of community in Western imaginations'. She further provides some examples: 'The Centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centered polis of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman' (Haraway 2001: 2298). Delany's queer cyborgs are definitely monstrous in the eyes even of those who fetishize them, as seen when the frelk whom the main character is attempting to seduce simultaneously deplores but is attracted to his/her neutering, saying: 'They could have found another way than neutering you, turning you into creatures not even androgynous; things that are—' (Delany 1967: 454). But cyborg monsters themselves are nothing new to the human imagination; they arguably exist even in the Bible as cherubim, making this story multiply biblically situated.

Throughout the Bible there are multiple references to cherubim, but mostly in the form of carvings outside temples and the Ark of the Covenant. They are angelic in nature, with angel wings, and they perform many of the same functions as angels. However, they are more accurately monster angels who guard the things they are carved onto, including Heaven itself, thus defining the boundaries between God and Man. In the Book of Ezekiel, cherubim become real, and they have human, animal *and mechanical* parts. God uses them to destroy Jerusalem, which has become corrupt and full of idolaters:

> And as for [the cherubim's] appearance, the four looked alike, something like a wheel within a wheel […] Their entire body, their rims, their spokes, their wings, and the wheels – the wheels of the four of them – were full of eyes all around […] Each one had four faces: the first face was that of the cherub, the second face was that of a human being, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle […] When [the wheels] stopped, the others stopped, and when they rose up, the others rose up with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them. (Ezekiel 10:10-10:17)

God also commands a man to take the coals that the cherubim make with their wheels in order to help destroy the city. Somehow attached to wheels full of eyes such that their spirit extends into them, these hybrid creatures have multiple jobs: they guard, destroy and, in Psalms, are depicted serving as mounts for God. It would, it seems, be difficult to find more fantastical cyborgs than Ezekiel's cherubim, except perhaps in China Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy, where human-consciousness-based cyborgs can be animal and/or machine. Cyborgs

have changed since Biblical times to be more than human-based animals and crude machinery, but their primary physical change has simply been that the technology that is part of them is more advanced than the wheel.

In 'Aye, and Gomorrah', just as cherubim were created by God to do his bidding, to guard the space between Heaven and Earth or, in Ezekiel's case, to commit violence in the name of protection, Delany's queer cyborgs are created in the age of posthumanism by the power of capitalism to do its bidding; to create, maintain and protect wealth accumulation. They do violence if necessary to protect wealth, for example the International Spacer Corps, who receive only brief mention in the story but are lauded by the frelks as heroes. If 'God is dead' in capitalist posthuman society, where humans have replaced God in their control over life, then cherubim died with Him, and the cyborg took their place. Or, as Haraway puts it in a critique of spiritually-inclined feminists, 'It is not just that "god" is dead; so is the "goddess"' (2001: 2282).

Aside from Gomorrah being an obvious choice for the name of a story about perverted sexualities – perverted in the sense of not being approved as mainstream – because of its relation to sodomy, why would Delany choose Gomorrah for his story's title? The biblical story of the destruction by God of Sodom and Gomorrah is well-known and oft-cited as a reason why homosexuality is a sin, since they were destroyed for being corrupt, and the final instance of corruption that sealed their fate was the townsfolk's attempt to 'sodomize' visiting angels sent to judge the corruption of the towns. Harkins points out that the title is found in the epigraph to Delany's collection of short stories, *Driftglass* (1971), which includes 'Aye, and Gomorrah'. The epigraph serves to retell Genesis 19 from the perspective of a survivor:

> …*Was Sodom destroyed?*
> Aye, and Gomorrah to six miles around it. The
> river beneath it boiled in the streets. The
> mountain vomited rock on the orchards.
> And no one now can live upon the place.
> *Oh, my city! What city may I found? Where*
> *now must I go make me a home?* (7)

Harkins effectively argues that both this epigraph and the story problematize 'how we situate the neoliberal age in a longer epoch of diaspora and displacement' (2012: 1074). When at every turn capital is attempting to obliterate resistance through co-optation, it is no wonder that even those with subversive potential may not know what to do with it, especially in the case of the Spacers, whose work entails frequent displacement and inability to find community. So if Spacers are neo-cherubim for the neoliberal posthuman age, created by the new gods of capital to maintain and reinforce their power, then what are they in comparison to the angels sent to Gomorrah?

Delany is doing more than rewriting a biblical story; I argue that he is taking

themes of queer displacement, oppression, death and diaspora implicit in the epigraph in a completely different direction with the story, in order to examine gender-queer performances as a threat to power. In contrast to the biblical story, in 'Aye, and Gomorrah' the Spacers/neo-cherubim have become a threat to power, but not a serious one because they still lack political consciousness. They are fallen angels in some rebellious ways, but ultimately they will do the bidding of their creators. Still, they hold out the possibility alluded to in the introductory quote: that 'if subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself' (Butler 2008: 127). What are these cyborgs but 'unexpected permutations' of capitalism as well, who have got out of hand not only because of what they are, but also because of the neo-Gomorrah of mischief that they are creating at the margins of the societies they are displaced into?

Spacers and Anti-Drag Performance

My reading of Spacers as neo-cherubim who define and reinforce the limits of community only goes so far in that it does not take into account the Spacers' Gomorrahan mischief, which is vital to their transgressive potential when seen in the context of Butler's ideas of subversion in drag performance. In other words, Spacers as cherubim are the ideal workers/servants of capital, but they are more accurately fallen angels (who have literally fallen from the sky) when they perform queerness.

Walton links cyborgs and queer performativity definitively in her essay, 'The Gender of the Cyborg' (2004). She writes that 'Like [Haraway's] cyborg politics, queer theory celebrates the destabilization of identity decentring the regulative norms of heterosexuality' (Walton 2004: 39). However, Walton questions whether 'the blurring boundaries and transgressive indeterminacy represented through the cyborg [is] any more powerful than those counterhegemonic cultural forms in which left-wing intellectuals invested so heavily in former times' (41), for example the '60s countercultural movement that Delany not only wrote his story in, but was also a part of. It is not my intention to provide an answer to Walton's question, but rather examine 'Aye, and Gomorrah' in light of it.

Along with the frelks, Spacers invite us to address a more specific question that Walton and Butler together help us to raise: what performances of gender indeterminacy are subversive (as opposed to performances of culturally constructed gender *determinacy*, which Butler focuses on)? And we might also ask if success is a requirement that makes an act subversive? In discussing parody of gender in drag performance, which Butler says is 'by itself not subversive' and can be 'domesticated and recirculated as [an] instrument of cultural hegemony' (Butler 2008: 189), she explains that a truly subversive performance cannot be defined by 'a typology of actions,' and is dependent on situational factors (200). Butler also acknowledges that the 'full-scale

transcendence of power' inherent in gendered binaries is an 'impossible fantasy' but calls for 'the subversive and parodic redeployment of power' nevertheless (169). So I ask: can at least a significant amount of the performative actions of the main character, his fellow Spacers, and their frelk ancestors/cousins meet the criteria for *subversive* parody, rather than just parody or other forms of ineffective resistance, like petty property destruction, that they engage in at the Texas border?

On two occasions of Spacer mischief-making, we see that even other marginalized groups are culturally more acceptable to society at large, presumably because they are less challenging to the gender binary. At the beginning of the story, they rout out French men having sex in a public restroom. The men reject their advances, claiming they will disrupt their understanding with the police. A similar thing happens with prostitutes near the Texas border, who do not want the frelks to disrupt their business with local johns. On both occasions, the Spacers (notably without obvious political intent) disrupt processes by which those in power oppress marginal Others – the police to homosexuals and the johns to prostitutes – though they do not rupture them completely. They are whisked away too quickly by their employer to do any real harm.

In contrast, at one point, two Spacers reminisce together about a time when they beat up two people – presumably akin to hippies – in the Flower Passage in Istanbul, who were dressed as Spacers as a way to cruise for frelks. They express incredulity at the idea that the cisgendered could be 'queer for frelks!' (Delany 1967: 452) This is an instance of the Spacers acting as boundary police – like the cherubim – and is a deliberately twisted version of real-life violence against queer folk. However, it also hints at the possibility that gender queerness is seeping back into the margins of a society that has retrenched into heteronormativity – but it is just a hint.

These instances show the ambivalence of the Spacers' performances of gender indeterminacy. Spacers simultaneously reinforce gender binaries while *remaining* within the margins of the binary; they are a boundary species that polices the boundary while simultaneously disrupting it. Additionally, their violence is (unintentionally, for them) parodic of heterosexual violence against queer Others. They expose the absurdity of violent gender performance – a.k.a. queer hate crimes – as being about shoring-up the fictive binaries of gender and power relations, when in fact those committing the crime are doing so because they are themselves unstable within that binary.

The Spacers thus parody gender through what I will call 'anti-drag performance'. I use 'anti-drag' as opposed to Butler's drag performativity since it serves the opposite goal as Butler's drag performance, though at the level of the story, the Spacers' actions are more nuanced. Two definitions here are needed before I can define the Spacers' anti-drag performances. First, that of performativity in general, which Butler defines as 'acts, gestures, and desire [which] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on*

the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause' (2008: 185). Thus, for Butler, all gender is performance. Drag performance, by contrast, is the imitation of gender, which '*implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself — as well as its contingency*' (emphasis original, 187). Of course, there are many different kinds of drag performance, including one in which the anatomy and the gender of the performer do not 'match' in a heteronormative sense. Generally however, the performer is gendered, while the performance is one of the opposite gender of the performer, or of gender-queerness. In any case, drag is meant to reveal that all gender is performative.

I call the Spacers' performances of mischief-making and gender violence 'anti-drag performances' since a non-gendered person is performing a gender or the actions and desire typical of gendered persons, rather than a gendered person performing the opposite gender or gender indeterminacy. It is a negative performance, rather than a liberatory one (the ostensible goal of drag performance), but recognizing the Spacer as an anti-drag performer shows how the story is a critique of capitalist posthumanism. By showing gender indeterminate people performing gender, the story ends up revealing the same thing that drag performances are meant to do: that is, the absurdity of the gender binary and the structures of neoliberal capitalism that use it for regulatory purposes.

There is another way of looking at these anti-drag performances that further cements the links between Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' and Butler's *Gender Trouble.* In an interview with Constance Penly and Andrew Ross, Haraway details how she situated the Manifesto against mainstream feminist theory at the time when it did not acknowledge positions of privilege: 'Again, it's the problem of being in the belly of the monster and looking for another story to tell, say, about some kind of creature with an unconscious that can nonetheless produce the unexpected, that can trip you, or trick you' (qtd Penley and Ross 1990: 14). That creature is of course the cyborg, however she explains it has roots in the Native American figure of the Coyote, which 'brings in another set of story cycles, where there is a resistance and a trickster, producing the opposite of – or something other than – what you thought you meant. Some kind of operator that tricks you, which is what I suppose the unconscious does' (15). This leads Penley to posit that Haraway is searching for a 'trickster cyborg'. The wanton, childlike nature of the Spacer's performances certainly seem to share the trickster mode; though they seem to lack consciousness around the political implications of their actions that Coyotes often have, those actions do serve to trip/trick the reader into thinking differently about gender.

Still in a trickster mode, the Spacers also use anti-drag performance to make gender trouble in their sexual activity with the frelks who fetishize them. Frelks appear in the story to be the only culturally sanctioned sexual partners for Spacers. Halfway through the story, the narrator, whom we discover was

originally sexed as male (and who I will from now on call 'he', because he essentially becomes male in this interaction), is solicited by a frelk named Yuri who is ostensibly female. Depicted as an impoverished artist, hippie-type, she admits to being 'flamboyant', and living a hippie lifestyle of painting, going to the theatre and spending time with friends (Delany 1967: 458). Thus begins a strange conversation about the politics of frelk-Spacer love, the pederastic perversion it entails, and narratorial asides about how the Spacer is willing to trick frelks into believing he is both younger and/or originally female to suit their desires. Throughout this conversation the Spacer expresses a longing not for sex in the hetero sense, but for some sort of connection, which he translates to being paid for an unspecified service.

The Spacer's repeated actions clearly come from a deep loneliness and lack of fulfilment, and are interspersed with his performative postulating of sexual ability as if he was a prostitute. He performs one of his most parodical anti-drag acts with the frelk, including when he postulates that he is untroubled by his neutering: 'I grinned and grabbed my crotch. "I'm happy with it".' Then he further narrates: 'I've never known why that's so much more obscene when a spacer does it' (Delany 1967: 455). The frelk eventually rejects his anti-drag advances, simultaneously feeling perverted in her solicitation and charitable towards the Spacer's longing and loneliness.

What are we to make of this longing for desire, what Delany terms 'desire for desire', and the Spacers' anti-drag acts? Perhaps it is a longing for the stability of the gender binary and hetero-sex, and the narrator acts out because he cannot express his desire for 'normalcy'. One gets the sense at many times in the narrative that these mischievous Spacers are merely children dealing unsuccessfully with their Otherness. There is no certainty here that in a gender-indeterminate sexual space, Spacers and frelks may eventually find solace in a non-gendered definition of sexual satisfaction. This possibility is glimpsed however in the frelk's repeated, though gentle, refusal to pay for the 'services', whatever they may be, of such a lonely Spacer, which hints that she knows there can be more to Spacer-frelk sexuality than simply perversion, and can see through his anti-drag performance. Thus, in a story that seems lightly mocking of hippie counter-culture, the hippie/freak redeems the counter-culture somewhat by being the only one who might understand the subversive potential of the cyborg who is soliciting her. But this is only a glimpse; the story rather more effectively presents the problematics of the gender binary and suggests that they will remain with us far into the future. The cyborg is certainly still needed for its mischievous subversions.

Conclusion

In Penley and Ross's interview, Haraway acknowledges some of the flaws in her 1985 concept of the cyborg, which she claims is really 'a polychromatic girl' rather than a true post-gender creature. She goes further, stating: 'She is a girl

who's trying not to become Woman, but remain responsible to women of many colours and positions; and who hasn't really figured out a politics that makes the necessary articulations with the boys who are your allies. It's undone work' (qtd Penley and Ross 1990: 23). This work is undone partly because of the pervasiveness of gendered categories – in Haraway's case, this is manifest in the ultimate gendering of the cyborg whom she meant to be post-gender, and in Delany's case the ultimate gendering of the Spacer and the frelk. It is also partly undone for Delany's Spacers because they *cannot* rather than *are trying not to* 'become Woman', and are such because of a hegemonic power. In other words, the attempt at subversion through an identity of gender indeterminacy has been co-opted in the form of the Spacer to serve capital in a way that mirrors the co-optation of the gay rights movement today. Just like the near impossibility of imagining utopia free of capitalism and power in our culturally situated capitalist moment, it is equally difficult to imagine a true end to gender as a culturally constructed binary.

That of course does not mean that this work should not be done. We see a strong acknowledgment of this in Delany's imagined future world, where queer cyborgs present a challenge to gender binaries in gender indeterminacy and subversive, anti-drag parody, but do not seem to have (up to the time of the narrative's end, at least) presented any sort of challenge sufficient enough to overcome capitalism and its regulatory fictions of gender; indeed the Spacers seem to want to be a part of them. 'Aye, and Gomorrah' is an effective 'queer critique of neoliberalism' (Harkins 2012: 1079), as well as of capitalist posthumanism, but it also shows how entrenched the structures of power will likely be even into the future, rather than postulating the sunnier version of the potential for queer cyborgs that Haraway first provided in 1985. In this way, Delany practically anticipated criticism of 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' that led to responses like the one above outlined in her interview, showing the malleability of queer science-fictional critiques over time, and reinforcing Haraway's contention that Delany is a great theorist for cyborgs. Delany's work as a queer critique of neoliberal posthuman society holds up surprisingly well almost fifty years later, and suggests a few of the many reasons that more rigorous studies situating queer theory as nascent in early queer science fiction are needed.

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Conference Reports

Locating Fantastika, Lancaster University, 7-8 July 2015
Rachel Fox (Lancaster University)

The second annual Fantastika conference brought together debates about fantasy, science fiction, and gothic/horror with an emphasis on the locational aspects of these imaginative spaces. With thirty-eight papers presented in fourteen parallel panels spread across two days, the event has gained momentum, almost doubling in size from the previous conference.

The first panel I attended, 'Nostalgia of the Ecological Past', set the tone for the day. Audrey Taylor (Anglia Ruskin) examined the relationship between fantasy and pastoralism, locating both in a nostalgia for the past and an appreciation for the power of the natural landscape. The intersections between the pastoral and fantasy that Taylor introduced resonated throughout the remainder of the panel. Polly Atkin (Strathclyde) focused on Grasmere as a fantastic, uncanny, culturally hybridized and over-determined space. She argued that the fantastic Grasmeres located in the poetry of Thomas De Quincey and in the *Doctor Who* audio show 'The Zygon Who Fell to Earth' displayed continuities with William Wordsworth's Grasmere, blurring the line between nature and super-nature. Judith Eckenhoff (Freiburg) then discussed the Arcadian and supernatural ecosystems in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, considering the relationship between agency in humans and the (super)natural. Kaja Franck (Hertfordshire) ended an excellent first panel with an analysis of 'Eco Gothic' in Glenn Duncan's *The Last Werewolf*. She explored the text in light of US frontier narratives, moving between the 'Old' and 'New' Worlds, and also through environmental policies, including the preservation of wilderness and park space; tagging animal species; and the decline in wolf populations.

Swapping the natural for the mechanical, the second panel I attended was 'Locating Monstrosity in Machine versus Human Intelligence'. John Sharples (Lancaster) considered the idea of a monstrousness that eludes physicality in Robert Löhr's *The Chess Machine*, and explored how scientific advancements developed from examinations of bodily anatomy. Stephen Curtis (also Lancaster) then looked at alternate histories involving the Nazis and, in particular, space and lunar travel, which conflate the very worst and best examples of human endeavour from the twentieth century. Both papers discussed how speculative developments in science (and machinery) are far more conceivable in narratives that have no ethical qualms.

Ruth Heholt (Falmouth) then gave an exciting and engaging keynote speech, 'Land of Myth and Magic: "West Barbary" and the Hammer House of Cornish Horror'. She determined that that which she called 'Cornish Gothic' exists as a

Celtic periphery, which is at once of, and not of, England. She proposed that Cornwall's landscape was in fact *made* for the Gothic; a palimpsestic space 'full of fissures in time, space and reality', built out of stone circles, sea and coastline, and ancient chasms. In its exploration of the Cornish landscape, Heholt's paper lent itself well to the locational theme of the conference. She also touched on locations further afield than Cornwall in her reading of the two 1960s Hammer films, *The Reptile* and *The Plague of the Zombie*. Both these films feature examples of reverse colonization, where the sinister supernatural force invades from without (Borneo and Haiti respectively), marked by the period of decolonization in which these films were produced, and the fear of infection from foreigners living amongst the white, 'civilized' population. Throughout Heholt's paper it was the transgression of natural boundaries (geographic, ecological, and biological) from which the Gothic emerged, signifying the importance of location in defining spaces of fantastika.

Following Heholt's keynote, I attended the panel 'Tangible Boundaries', which focused on boundary spaces between locations and explored the common theme of the threshold. Hannah Boaden (Lancaster) focused on the doorways between known and unknown spaces in the *Resident Evil* franchise, and scrutinized the feelings of entrapment, anxiety, and vulnerability experienced by humans navigating the continually divided space. Corinna Joerres (Oxford) then looked at barriers of a different type, focusing on re-imaginings of Hadrian's Wall in George R.R. Martin's and Garth Nix's fantasy fiction, considering the wall as a division and a cross-hatch of fluctuating time and space. Brian Baker (Lancaster) offered a whirlwind narrative of the 'cosmological bedroom' found in films like *Interstellar*, *Contact* and *Solaris*. Baker identified the bedroom as a point of departure into space (a launch pad), and suggested that the cosmological bedroom resembles something like an underworld space (and a space of resurrection), composed of ghostly transmissions (Electronic Voice Phenomenon narratives). The final panel I attended, 'Pattern Construction of Video Games', served to emphasize re-mediations between world(s) and narrative. Dawn Stobbart (Lancaster) surveyed the narrative structure of *Alan Wake*, and Thomas Brassington (also Lancaster) discussed cartography and world building in *Oddworld* and *Skyrim*.

I spoke in the opening panel of the second day, 'Heterotopias of Fantastika'. Sean Wilcock (Leeds Beckett) applied Farah Mendlesohn's taxonomy of fantasy to the internet, where he suggested that the digital space resembles a magic portal that must be navigated intuitively. My own paper looked at Arthur Rackham's illustrations in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and examined the ways through which the relationship between writing and image might conceive of a palimpsestic and heterotopic faerie space (and species); composite, in-between, and abject. While my paper considered the faerie space of Kensington Gardens as a heterotopia, Lauren Randall (Lancaster) identified the eponymous theme park of Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* as a heterotopic,

liminal space, and explored acts of 'gothic tourism' in the abject wilderness of the Floridian swampland. Who would have thought that Edwardian London and contemporary Florida could find a common playground?

Following this, I attended the panel entitled 'Mapping Political Ideologies of Fantastika'. Aishwarya Subramanian (Newcastle) focused on the ambiguities of imperialism in C.S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, offering an in-depth reading of the wizard Corikan and the Dufflepuds that inhabit the Island of the Voices, and problematizing the figure of the so-called 'good colonizer' (Coriakan and Prince Caspian) as liberator. Staying firmly in the world of fantasy, Nick Hubble (Brunel) then argued that Naomi Mitchison's *Travel Light* succeeds in creating a genuine alternative to traditional princess, hero and dragon tropes, dismantling these in favour of a female agency that alludes a (typically tragic) patriarchal narrative. Sarah Lohmann (Durham) then introduced us to the advantages of Marge Piercy's and Joanna Russ's feminist 'bottom-up' utopias that emerge from complex, interactive, 'inherently dynamic systems' that compose sustainable, non-static environments. Not only did all these papers evidence disruptions to ideologies and tropes in fantasy fiction, the Q&A also highlighted the gendering of these texts, where women came to stand as agents of positive change.

Midway through the second day keynote speaker Philippa Semper (Birmingham) delivered an address on '"The past is a fantastical country": Otherworlds from Medieval to Modern'. Semper explored the relationship between medieval past and fantasy, beginning with a quotation from L.P. Hartley: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'. She looked at how nostalgia for the past, and the maintenance of heritage, work towards constructing self-identity and community. She explored ways through which fictionalized alterity of the past in constructed fantasy locations such as Middle Earth and Westeros result in an uncanny landscape. Semper suggested that the nostalgically constructed past is at once familiar and alien, and traced modern examples of fantasy landscapes in texts ranging from Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* to Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Her wide-ranging discussion of the role of the hero; the (anti-)quest; and the construction of a parallel (romanticized) otherworld resonated with papers given throughout the two days, especially those from the first panel. As the conference came to a close, it was clear that the papers and both keynotes were offering a coherent collection of perspectives and readings on the locations of fantastika.

I was very excited to be able to chair the final panel 'World without Borders'. Douglas Leatherland (Durham) explored the maps of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, and Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea. He scrutinized the Orientalist model of the trajectory of quests that move from 'West' to 'East', but also suggested that the borders in fantasy maps are often divided ecologically rather than politically (and should, perhaps, aim for a balance between the two). Catherine Spooner (Lancaster) offered a reading of Jim Jarmusch's film *Only Lovers Left Alive*,

and looked at how vampire travel has accelerated in the twenty-first century, arguing that the increasingly mobile protagonists of the film, as eternal tourists, consume foreign landscapes and its inhabitants. Chris Pak (Lancaster) then detailed why entrepreneurial endeavouring is vital to science fiction, which itself had long anticipated space exploration, fuelling a desire to travel out. It was great to see three predominant areas of fantastika – fantasy, gothic, science fiction – come together to discuss location at the grand scale of the world… or even beyond it.

The conference finished with a roundtable discussion chaired by conference organizer Charul (Chuckie) Patel (Lancaster). The panellists included Heholt, Semper, Baker and Spooner, who led an informal session with contributions from the audience, resulting in a relaxed atmosphere as the conference came to a close. Discussion ranged from the orientation and limitations of mapping to the pros, cons, and accessibility of digital and archaic maps; from the difference between mapping territory versus the route to treasure to the idea that maps sell the conceit of fantasy, thus making fantasy worlds plausible. The roundtable also included a discussion about mapping different genres in fantastika. Spooner concluded the roundtable, noting humorously that despite multiple questions being posed at the beginning of the session, we had managed to speak about maps for the entire duration of the discussion. It seemed apt that for a conference on location, the idea of the map should have been so prominent during this final discussion, and, as Heholt noted, also appeared in a vast number of the papers presented throughout the two days. The roundtable brought together a lot of the ideas that had been introduced throughout the conference and offered a chance for everyone to make any final comments about the overall theme: *locating* fantastika.

The conference ran smoothly and was incredibly well organized. It boasted a great collection of papers from speakers, and I should say that I struggled hugely to choose which panels to attend. The atmosphere was incredibly positive and participants shared an informal dinner on the evening of the first day. With over 400 tweets sent to #Fantastika2015, the conference also enjoyed an impressive online presence, demonstrating the excitement had for the two-day event. A special edition of the Lancaster University postgraduate journal *The Luminary* is expected to be released in 2016, featuring papers presented at the conference, and next year will also see the third annual conference, *Global Fantastika*.

From Manland to Womanland: Gender in Science Fiction and Fantasy, Brunel University, 17 July 2015
Nick Hubble (Brunel University)

This one-day conference, organized by Emma Filtness and Joe Norman of the Faeries and Flying Saucers research cluster at Brunel, commenced with

Jude Roberts' keynote talk, 'Figuring it Out: Representing Non-Binary Gender in SFF Comics'. Roberts began by referencing Alex Dally Macfarlane's Tor blog, 'Post-Binary Gender in SF' (2014), and its discussion of how non-binary gender can be represented, before moving on to explore this question with respect to comics. Roberts focused her analysis on two texts: the Marvel series, *Runaways* (2003–9), created by Brian K. Vaughan and Adrian Alphona, and the web-comic, *The Order of the Stick* (2003–-). While the former's Xavin shifts between male and female form, the gender of the latter's Vaarsuvius is never identified, becoming both a long-running joke and the topic of intense debate on various message boards dedicated to the series. Through discussing these two examples, Roberts introduced the idea, which would recur throughout the day, that representation is itself a form of limitation on the expression of gender.

In the following panel, Emily Cox referred to the recurrence of female machines in sf literature and film, from Maria/Futura in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) to Rachel, in both Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Cox drew upon Giorgio Agamben to argue, with special reference to *Star Trek: Voyager's* Seven of Nine, that the uncertainties which haunt such gynoids and cyborgs highlight the strangeness of socially-constructed femaleness. Joe Norman then discussed the representation of gender in Iain M. Banks' Culture series by analysing Djan Seriy Anaplian from *Matter* (2008) in the light of Gwyneth Jones' claim that Banks' female leads are merely depictions of 'perfect girlfriends'. His conclusion was that, while there is obviously truth in the allegation (Banks even admitted in interviews that he was half in love with his female protagonists), there is often more to them than that. The subsequent discussion picked up on this point by casting doubts on Banks' claim that the Culture is a fully post-patriarchal society but also acknowledging that his works open up interesting questions and possibilities beyond conventional gender roles and relations.

Clair Schwarz began her paper, 'Mind the Gap: Gendered and Liminal Holes, Apertures and Fissures in the Films of David Cronenberg', by applauding the bravery of the organizers for scheduling her presentation immediately after lunch. Pointing out that much of the distinction between female and male bodies concerns the anatomy of holes, Schwarz analysed Cronenberg's biologically excessive presentation of holed bodies in great detail – leavened only by a series of delicious deadpan asides – in order to argue that the way in which his treatment of the body is often simultaneously horrific, abject and comic creates a liminal uncertainty by which gendered bodies are repositioned from their binary separation into a place of the in-between. Emma Filtness also focused on liminality by discussing how the bisexuality of Bo, the female lead of the television series *Lost Girl* (2010–15), generates a continual uncertainty which is compounded by her being a succubus. Her paper explored the often simultaneous visibility and invisibility of bisexuality on screen.

In the final panel of the day, I spoke about Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand*

of Darkness (1969) and Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013) as both being examples of literary experiment designed to destabilize and radically question normative representation. Ben Nichols outlined one strand of queer theory's hostility towards reproduction as forming, alongside normativity and the status quo, a dreary and repetitive commitment to more of the same and then examined this argument by analysing Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Marge Piercy's *Woman at the Edge of Time* (1976); two works which imagine forms of social and biological reproduction as the key to equitable societies. He concluded that reproduction separated from heteronormativity is clearly not incompatible with utopia and that these sf texts also function as a critique of Western devaluation of homosexuality as a misguided orientation towards sameness. The last speaker, Fran Bigman, considered two novels, Anthony Burgess' *The Wanting Seed* (1962) and Naomi Mitchison's *Solution Three* (1975), in which homosexuality is encouraged as a solution to overpopulation. Although both of these novels link homosexuality and heterosexuality respectively to sameness and difference, and are therefore complicit with the devaluation of homosexuality Nicholls referred to, Bigman demonstrated how a comparative critical reading of the texts has the potential to destabilize the privileged position of compulsory heterosexuality. A lively discussion concerning such topics as cloning and parthenogenesis followed this panel.

Overall, the day was more one for raising and exploring questions rather than for coming to conclusions but this was felt to be apt given that the experience of gender itself seems to be becoming more fluid or, at least, increasingly recognized as such. There is clearly much more work to be done and the organizers are considering extending the project through a call for papers for an edited collection.

Book Reviews
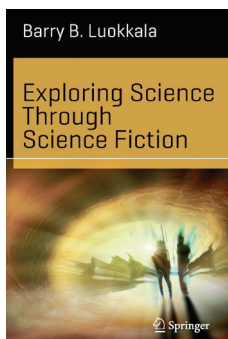
Barry B. Luokkala, *Exploring Science Through Science Fiction* (Springer, 2014, 241pp, £19.99)

Reviewed by Kanta Dihal (University of Oxford)

The connection between science and science fiction has often been explored in science popularizations by playing out the fictionality of sf against the realism of science. There are many books and TV series that attempt to teach the reader about real science by comparing it to fiction they are already familiar with. From *Mythbusters* to *The Science of Doctor Who/Interstellar/The Big Bang Theory*, an avid fan will often find that there is a medium that has explored their favourite science fiction work in great scientific detail. In some cases, such as *Doctor Who* and Larry Niven's *Ringworld* (1970), such explorations have even led to scientific papers. Physics professor Barry B. Luokkala has recognized the usefulness of this bridging of the arts and sciences in the classroom, and his textbook, part of Springer's Science and Fiction series, comes out of more than a decade of teaching an undergraduate course on this topic.

In the introduction, Luokkala describes how Lawrence Krauss's *The Physics of Star Trek* (1995) inspired him to create his course and its textbook, although he also wanted to venture beyond physics. He therefore presents seven themed chapters, each approaching a topic found in science fiction: space and time travel; matter, energy and interactions; computing and cognition; extraterrestrial intelligence; biotechnology; science and society; and the future. Luokkala's text deals mostly with films and TV series, and hardly at all with novels or short stories. Although he gives no justification for this selection, the attractive element of visualization might have been one possible motivation. The abstract nature of science tends to be off-putting for the casual reader, and visualizations of physical phenomena are often scarce. Film in this case can provide a holdfast, although Luokkala does not go into instances where the science is sound but incorrectly visualized. The filmography seems haphazard: there is a heavy focus on *Star Trek,* which makes one wonder how much overlap there is with Krauss. Luokkala also includes several films, such as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Angels and Demons*, and several James Bond films, that he acknowledges are not science fiction. The criterion applied here seems to have been 'scientific concepts used in film' rather than 'science fiction film', as the films are used as springboards to start a discussion of the particular scientific topic the author wants to address.

This use of primary works ties in with the rather awkwardly phrased goal of the Science and Fiction series, explained in the front matter of the book:

'Journey with the authors as they […] exploit science fiction for educational purposes.' As this phrase may suggest, there is no critical engagement with the works themselves, and Luokkala does not seem to be particularly interested in contextualizing the works he discusses. For instance, he makes the very dubious claim that 'many sci-fi purists do not count [*Frankenstein*] as science fiction, perhaps because it contains almost no science', and that 'H.G. Wells described a four-dimensional spacetime […] 10 years before Einstein published his special theory of relativity', although Joseph-Louis Lagrange had already postulated it in 1788. His brief foray into biology is an unfortunate one. He makes the astonishing claim about *Jurassic Park*'s dinosaur cloning used with mosquito blood that 'The procedure is fraught with technical difficulties, but is plausible, in principle.' In fact, we have known for several years that the half-life of DNA is roughly five hundred years, and that experiments which tried to extract DNA from amber-preserved fossils yield heavily damaged fragments.

The book has a quaint feel to it, mainly in its use of images. Luokkala has chosen not to include screen shots, posters or other copyrighted material from the primary texts. The illustrations in the book are all created by the author: felt-tip drawings of spaceships, and photographs of objects he owns, such as stick-and-ball atomic models. One pie chart even looks like the author made it himself in an early version of Excel. If this was necessary to keep down the cost of the book, it is an admirable move on the author's side to have gone to these lengths on behalf of students. Unfortunately, the editing seems also to have been carried out under a limited budget: the index is not always correct, italics have been used rather randomly, and the book contains many punctuation and spelling errors.

In the manner of all science textbooks, four of the chapters contain mathematical problems for the students to solve. Luokkala is not hiding the fact that many of these problems are of the type that a scientist would scribble on a beermat during a heated pub discussion. He calls the problems 'estimations', making it clear to students that they have to make certain assumptions in order to perform the calculations, as the video extracts the problems are based on often do not provide all of the necessary information. Depending on the audience, these calculations are either intended to amuse the student or simply to get them acquainted with the idea of performing calculations to check facts.

The best aspect of these calculations, however, is the part that is not in the book. Luokkala does not allow his students to get away with simply working through this one book and following all the steps. Students have to find things out for themselves: they have to go to the website of the Large Hadron Collider to look up how much antimatter it produces, or they have to look up Boltzmann's constant in 'tables of physical constants', though it is not explained where such a table may be found. This approach encourages the reader to work out where to access scientific knowledge. Such an approach to the scientific method, in which students learn how to work on problems on their own, is often missing

from the popular works of science that are usually available to non-scientists. Each chapter also ends with a list of 'exploration topics', non-mathematical questions that allow the student to explore the history of science and its current developments. For these questions, the students are given a number of sources – usually from *Scientific American* and *Physics Today*, but sometimes from professional scientific journals – which they can use to find the answer. Luokkala has done an excellent job in making sure that as many of his secondary texts as possible are open access. The journal articles he refers to are often accessible via arXiv, he includes references to science demonstrations that can be found on YouTube, and he even manages to refer students to an *xkcd* comic for further information, making this very much a textbook of our time.

This leaves us with the question of the intended audience for this book. The blurb claims that the book is 'designed as a primary text for a college-level course which should appeal to students in the fine arts and humanities as well as to science and engineering students.' At the same time, the introduction states that 'The amount of material included in the book is actually more than can be covered in a single semester.' The former claim seems incompatible with the latter: the book has only eight chapters, and the average undergraduate science student would flit through them in no time at all, as the science discussed does not exceed GCSE level. For such a student, however, parts of the book will soon start to feel repetitive. The storyline of *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, for instance, is told at length no fewer than four times, with almost identical phrasing. The book seems intended more for a reader to dip into a preferred topic than for a group of students to diligently work through from beginning to end.

Nevertheless, this book may work very well for an audience of non-scientists, as it provides an engaging introduction to scientific thinking. The proposed discussion topics may indeed work best in a mixed classroom, in which students will be able to learn how views on the topic under discussion may differ between scientists and non-scientists. One may wonder, however, how well this textbook could be implemented in university systems that differ from the US. Science courses for humanities students are still relatively scarce in Europe, for instance, where a broad liberal arts curriculum is rare.
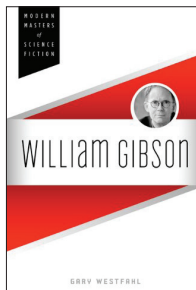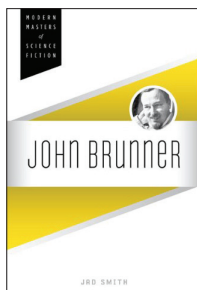
Jad Smith, *John Brunner* (University of Illinois Press, 2013, 200pp, £14.99)

Gary Westfahl, *William Gibson* (University of Illinois Press, 2013, 224pp, £15.99)

Reviewed by Andrew Hedgecock

The Illinois Modern Masters are described as 'books that survey the work of individual authors who continue to inspire and advance science fiction', but in the case of these two volumes there is also careful and valuable consideration of how the lives, environments and associations of John Brunner and William Gibson have influenced their work.

Readers who tackle both of these thorough and engaging works of scholarship will be struck by surprising overlaps in the intentions and aspirations of Brunner and Gibson. Points of contact between the two writers include fierce independence, a sharp focus on the craft of storytelling, and a conviction that sf can support wider understanding of social, political and environmental transformation. In addition, they both exhibit a drive to blend literate and popular sf storytelling; an ambition to meld art and commerce.

One of the most shocking revelations, though, is that Gibson, at the age of 66, and still widely perceived to be an energetic, influential and relevant chronicler of our era, has already lived six years longer than Brunner. When Brunner died of a stroke at the 1995 WorldCon in Glasgow, his health, critical reputation and sales had been in decline for nearly twenty years.

Jad Smith's study of Brunner's life and work is, in essence, a tragedy in which personal flaws amplified bad luck to undermine a literary career and obscure a reputation. Smith is at his best when it comes to unpicking the relationship between the man and his literary career. At times I was reminded of Alan Bennett's sharp appraisal of the actor Christopher Plummer: 'his own worst enemy – but only just'. Smith's research captures the complexity of a writer who celebrated his own bloody-mindedness, and suggests that the uncompromising professionalism admired by some writers, critics and publishers was seen as self-destructive arrogance by others. Even Brunner's admirers despaired at aspects of his behaviour: Robert Silverberg describes a 'prickly perfectionist' who made powerful enemies who 'did him disservices', while Christopher Priest's appreciation of Brunner's intellect, integrity and support for young writers was tempered by the recognition of a 'defensive veneer' that led to awkward interactions.

Smith's focus on Brunner's personal style and his difficult relations with writers and editors is no mere distraction, nor simply a means of adding colour to a work of scholarship. It is a crucial area of investigation for a book that tries to understand why a prolific, innovative and accessible writer, who tackled some of the most crucial issues of his era, was not more widely celebrated after his untimely death.

The book begins with an introduction placing Brunner's work in the context of the five decades in which he wrote. It also establishes his key influences, achievements and major obsessions: parallel worlds, the humanization of science, ecological collapse, overpopulation, and excessive corporate power. Smith goes on to assess Brunner's rise and fall as a writer, in three extended chapters. The first tracks the young Brunner's growing obsession with sf

through the discovery of his grandfather's 1898 edition of *War of the Worlds*, his juvenile writing, his first publication (achieved while still at school), and the pseudonymous release of his debut novel *Galactic Storm* (1951). Smith shows how the author's upbringing, education, relationship with his wife Marjorie, and experience as an sf fan influenced his approach to writing. Brunner sought to hone his ability to create taut and entertaining pulp plots while, at the same time, trying to help establish sf as a 'literature of conscience'. As a result he had to deal with two key pressures: firstly, producing work he considered to be art while coping with financial problems; and secondly, establishing a range of techniques that enabled sf rooted in the human sciences to be accepted as entertainment rather than being dismissed as an author's soapbox. Smith highlights the political commitment, influenced by Marjorie, which led him to write the CND anthem 'The H-Bomb's Thunder'. This radicalism also informed short fiction such as 'Hope Deferred' (1956), which linked authoritarian government, economic collapse and the misuse of science in relation to children. This first segment of the book also identifies work that foreshadows Brunner's future development. For example, the parallel world story, *Earth is But a Star* (1958), which melds a quest, colourful settings and exotic encounters with moral enquiry and a challenging thought experiment. Smith explains that Brunner's strategy at this point in his career was to churn out as many stories as possible to subsidize the additional time he needed to produce more complex and demanding work. This included *The Whole Man* (aka *The Telepathist*) (1964), which dealt with poverty, terrorism, physical deformity and revolution, and *The Squares of the City* (1965), a strange brew of political thriller and sociological sf with a structure based on moves in the 1892 Steinitz-Chigorin chess match.

In the book's second section Smith deals with the author's peak years, and focuses on Brunner's key works – *Quicksand* (1967), *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), *The Shockwave Rider* (1975), and the book widely acknowledged to be his masterpiece, *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). Smith suggests this rich and complex story was informed by a number of the author's developing obsessions: for example, his interest in the discipline of communications theory and the notion of art as a means of perceiving the environment, as set out in Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). Another issue Smith outlines with impressive clarity is Brunner's fascination with the twin cultures of British and American sf, the former with its roots in literary fiction and social pessimism, the latter more informed by pulp fiction and scientific optimism. Smith suggests Brunner's writing from this period should be viewed through the prism of his struggle to reconcile these competing influences. *Stand on Zanzibar* reworks traditional sf tropes through multiple viewpoints and dislocated scenes, and is intercut with snatches of poetry, songs, news stories, advertisements and fragments of essays. The book became better known for its stylistic breakthroughs than the urgency of its themes – overpopulation, eugenics, the abuse of corporate power, mass paranoia and ecological crisis. This, for Smith, prevented Brunner

from gaining the pioneering reputation he richly deserved. In addition, the fact that his interests lay in near space, as opposed to inner space, placed him at odds with the New Wave writers who dominated British sf in the 1960s. This led to a sense of isolation and, ultimately, alienation; a fate exacerbated by Brunner's tendency to court controversy.

The third section examines the impact of Brunner's declining health, his financial problems and the impact of personal battles on his work. Smith notes a shift from urgent topicality to a more reflective focus on cultural history, but highlights the prolific and varied nature of Brunner's later work, which included sf, supernatural mystery, horror and comic dystopia. Sadly, Brunner's audience declined and he received considerably less critical attention in his final years, despite harbouring hopes of a comeback up until his death. The book closes with a 1975 interview, by Steven L. Goldstein, which is excruciatingly clumsy at the start but worthy of inclusion because it shows, in sharp relief, the awkwardness, bizarre doubts, dubious certainties and intensely held interests of a flawed and fascinating artist.

Smith's book clearly places Brunner in the context of the post-war literary and political landscapes and highlights his considerable achievements in terms of blending pulp and serious sf. In some ways he was ahead of his time: his talent lay in remixing genre elements rather than stylistic innovation, but Smith makes a clear case for Brunner as a forerunner of contemporary idea merchants such as Paolo Bacigalupi, Bruce Sterling and William Gibson, who cross-fertilize a range of forms.

Which brings us to Gary Westfahl's volume on Gibson. Gibson's life has almost been an inversion of Brunner's. Following an unsettled childhood, the early death of his father, an introverted adolescence and expulsion from school, Gibson has lived with his partner Deborah for more than forty years and raised a family in Vancouver. Westfahl suggests the most interesting and noteworthy aspects of Gibson's life since his youth have been his novels and other writings.

The book tackles Gibson's life and work thematically and chronologically. The first section is a brief biographical sketch and the second deals with his cartoons and articles for fanzines. There are interesting insights into the young writer's interests in fiction and music. Westfahl's view is that this juvenilia and amateur work offers no clear hints of Gibson's future concerns or stylistic development, but its 'engaging spirit of youthful energy' means it deserve a wider audience. Many readers, including Gibson's admirers, will need more compelling evidence before committing time to hunting down these early fragments.

The third section is a sedulously honest and detailed appraisal of Gibson's short fiction. Westfahl identifies stories with interesting ideas and impressive passages of prose – for example 'New Rose Hotel', 'Burning Chrome' and 'Dougal Discarnate' – but comes to the conclusion that Gibson's digressive thinking and drive to explore provocative themes make him a 'natural novelist'. Westfahl also feels the novel form has forced Gibson to create the fully developed characters

his stories need in order to achieve his ambition of tackling complex themes in a way that appeals to the widest possible audience. For Westfahl, Gibson is both an idiosyncratic artist and an operator who knows his market.

In section four, Westfahl considers the development and impact of Gibson's 'Sprawl trilogy', *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). These works which, at the time, marked a notable shift from the dominance of space opera led to Gibson becoming the most notable exponent of a new form, 'cyberpunk', featuring down-at-heel heroes, the abuse of power by mega-corporations, urban landscapes so threatening they were all but inimical to survival, extravagant metaphors, and a ground-breaking specificity in descriptions of old and new technologies. Westfahl celebrates Gibson's achievement in opening sf to new readers through the 'Sprawl' books, but notes that Gibson's reluctance to extrapolate technological development further into the future, or into space, meant *Mona Lisa Overdrive* represented an impasse. His means of overcoming that impasse is set out in section five, which reflects on *The Difference Engine* (1990), a novel co-written with Sterling in the newly defined genre of 'steampunk' and set in an alternative nineteenth century Britain. Westfahl sees alternative histories as elaborate game-playing rather than enlightening commentary, and assesses the book as interesting and entertaining, but a creative dead-end. Westfahl also critiques Gibson's screenplays, lyrics, poetry and nonfiction in this section, including the playful and informal use of his Twitter account.

Section six focuses on the 'Bridge trilogy': *Virtual Light* (1993), *Idoru* (1996) and *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999). Westfahl notes that by 1993 Gibson's interest had shifted away from artificial intelligence and computer networks towards consideration of the impact of media and technology on marginalized characters. Westfahl identifies other departures in this trilogy, such as a developing interest in speculative sociology in *Virtual Light* (another point of contact between Gibson and Brunner), although Westfahl suggests the book is flawed by an imbalance in viewpoint and a lack of narrative drive. This chapter also showcases Westfahl's achievement as a scholar: for example, he links the extent and nature of the books' acknowledgements sections to the relative challenge of Gibson's undertaking in terms of shifting style and addressing new themes. Westfahl is a genuine literary detective, marshalling evidence to highlight the author's choices and paths not taken. An important aspect of Westfahl's admiration for Gibson is the rejection by an author who exhibits clear awareness of his market of easy commercial choices in favour of venturing into new literary territories.

The seventh section reflects on Gibson's novels set in a 'real world' present: *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007) and *Zero History* (2010). Westfahl defends the definition of this trilogy as sf in spite of Gibson's own doubts about its applicability. These narratives depend, argues Westfahl, on a mode of perception with its roots in sf. They are, in a sense, based on an

sf sensibility. Westfahl identifies a range of influences on the books, including Gibson's own earlier work. He also reflects on the author's tendency to lose faith in his ideas in the third books of his trilogies and considers the paradox underpinning Gibson's later work – recognition that it is becoming impossible to write science fiction in a world that needs science fiction more than ever to make sense of contemporary life. The book concludes with a touching and revealing interview between Gibson and Westfahl, and a final section that celebrates an author whose clear understanding of his audience is undercut with a refreshing degree of independence and artistic restlessness.
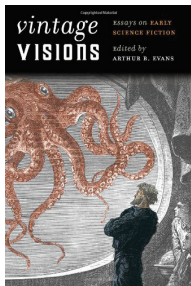
Arthur B. Evans, ed. *Vintage Visions: Essays on Early Science Fiction* (Wesleyan University Press, 2014, ix + 433pp, £23.00)

Reviewed by Patrick Parrinder (University of Reading)

In the words of its editor, this anthology of sixteen essays reprinted from the journal *Science Fiction Studies*, 'brings together some of the finest essays ever published on early science fiction'. Each essay is reprinted exactly as it first appeared – which allows for the perpetuation of a few small errors – but with the addition of a brief Afterword, usually by the author. The volume concludes with a list of 150 'key works of early science fiction', followed by a 75-page secondary bibliography claiming to be 'the largest of its kind ever published'. The back cover contains impressive endorsements from David Seed, Robert Crossley, John Rieder and Bruce Sterling, and I share their enthusiasm. All serious scholars and students of sf should have this book on their shelves, but *Vintage Visions* also deserves to be welcomed – though, realistically, it probably won't be – as a striking contribution to literary studies as a whole.

What exactly is meant by 'early science fiction'? The phrase sounds definitive, but it exemplifies what one contributor calls the 'retrolabelling' routinely practised by sf historians and, once looked into, its coherence tends to disappear. For example, the list of key works at the end of *Vintage Visions* contains such surprising inclusions as Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890). Terms such as 'utopia' and 'romance', not to mention the key nineteenth-century division between utopian and scientific romances, play little part in this book. Evans republishes his own 1988 essay on 'Science Fiction vs. Scientific Fiction in France', which views Jules Verne's '"travel and learn" narrative format' as exemplifying pedagogical 'scientific fiction' rather than sf; but his Afterword states that he now disavows this approach. The book also reprints Gary Westfahl's controversial 1992 essay championing Hugo Gernsback's

definition of sf as 'The Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe Type of Story'. Gernsback's generous reprint policy in his magazines (generous, that is, when he did not have to pay his authors) would hardly have extended to More or Morris. But, if Gernsback introduced the practice of retrolabelling, the Preface to *Vintage Visions* somewhat paradoxically offers the term 'early science fiction' as a way of avoiding it. According to Evans, this term's very vagueness 'allows these pre-modern fictional texts to stand on their own and be considered within their specific historical contexts, rather than being viewed as an unfinished "pre-" version of something else'. It follows that this book stands or falls by its contribution to broad literary and cultural history, a test that Evans' selections can be seen to pass with great distinction.

In some cases, we are given a careful historical reading of an individual text. Sylvie Romanowski expertly traces the mixture of alchemy and Cartesian rationalism in Cyrano de Bergerac's voyages to the moon and sun, the earliest works to be considered here. (Romanowski's Appendix, featuring brief narrative summaries for those unfamiliar with the two voyages, would, however, have been better moved from the end of her essay to the beginning.) Andrea Bell places Francisco Miralles' *Desde Júpiter* (1878) in its nineteenth-century context as 'Chile's Earliest Science-Fiction Novel', while Nicholas Ruddick argues on the basis of a couple of topical references in *The Time Machine* that the two dinner parties given by Wells' Time Traveller take place on specific dates at the beginning of February 1894. (Though there is not space to argue it here, I now suspect that Ruddick's ingenious logic is skewed and that attempts to be over-precise about Wells' temporal setting raise as many problems as they appear to answer.) Both the historical approach of *Vintage Visions* and the breadth of the history on offer are reflected in Allison de Fren's essay on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Tomorrow's Eve* (1886), an essay notable for its lengthy and extraordinarily fascinating excursus on Renaissance anatomical treatises. Less historical, but no less interesting, is Josh Bernatchez's analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) in the light of Elaine Scarry's 1985 study, *The Body in Pain*.

Other essays in this book state their commitment to literary history in their very titles. Thus we have 'German Theories of Science Fiction' (William B. Fischer), 'Latin American Science Fiction Discovers Its Roots' (Rachel Haywood Ferreira) and 'Future-War Fiction: The First Main Phase' (I.F. Clarke). Clarke's 1991 survey is excellently complemented by William J. Fanning, Jr's study of 'The Historical Death Ray and Science Fiction in the 1920s and 1930s', in the course of which Fanning observes that one remarkable spin-off from the (usually crackpot) experiments with 'death rays' between the wars was the development of radar. As for the former piece, while it is vintage Clarke it essentially revisits material that he had covered at much greater length in *Voices Prophesying War* (1966). Other essays (notably those by Westfahl and Paul K. Alkon) may be viewed as first – or, in Alkon's case, near-final – drafts

for chapters now readily available in the authors' well-known monographs. Westfahl even adds a splenetic Afterword suggesting that he finds the present reprint of his early work (which was originally much interfered with, he claims, by the then editor Robert M. Philmus) rather pointless. A rather different case is Stanislaw Lem's 'On Stapledon's *Star Maker*', a translated chapter from the author's Polish monograph on *Science Fiction and Futurology*. One's feeling that this essay does less than justice to Stapledon is considerably alleviated by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr's Afterword commenting on Lem's 'deep and troubled kinship' with the earlier writer.

The remaining essays in *Vintage Visions* include Patrick A. McCarthy on Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and Susan Gubar's eloquent and pioneering account of 'C. L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction'. I have left until last a piece that exemplifies the strengths of this collection, Kamila Kinyon's reconsideration of Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920). Although the impact of *R.U.R.* gave to the world the word *robot*, Čapek's contribution to sf has rarely had the prominence it deserves. The form in which *R.U.R.* became most widely known – as a stage play in English opening in London's West End in 1923 – accounts to some extent, at least, for its relative neglect in later years. Drawing on Čapek's doctoral dissertation on American pragmatism in relation to the German philosophical tradition, Kinyon shows how ruthless was the intellectual oversimplification of *R.U.R.* in the Paul Selver translation (adapted for the stage by Nigel Playfair) which alone remains in print in the UK. The 1989 Novack-Jones translation published in the US is said to be far preferable, but part of Kinyon's interpretation hinges on a key difference between English and Czech grammar which no translator has managed to surmount. This essay is a model of the historically and philologically-informed close reading which *Science Fiction Studies*, at its best, has brought to bear on earlier sf.
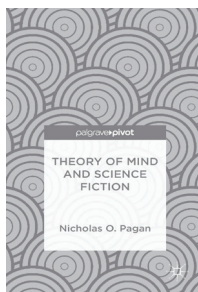
Nicholas O. Pagan, *Theory of Mind and Science Fiction* (Palgrave Pivot, 2014, vii + 79pp, £47.00)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer (University of Liverpool)

'Palgrave Pivots' are a relatively new venture: a series of monographs longer than an essay but shorter than a full-length book. Nicholas Pagan provides an introduction to 'Theory of Mind' – a concept apparently first named as such in 1978 when researchers into primates investigated whether chimpanzees were able to intuit that they *and other chimps* were minds that were self-aware. In other words, social animals such as chimps – and humans – find that their social bonds are strengthened by understanding that 'you' have feelings and reactions to the world just as 'I' do, and that we can pick up cues

about each other's feelings and reactions. This is, of course complicated by later theories of consciousness which eschew any idea of there being a *single* consciousness ('I' am in fact, according to some of these theories, a kind of consensus of multiple states, a story that I tell myself to create this illusion that 'I' am feeling), and the fact that there are different ways of understanding what another might feel. One person might have a sense of *empathy*: another might simply have learned that, say, particular facial expressions *mean* that a person is feeling an emotion, without actually having any sense of understanding what that might be (or simply not caring). Pagan argues that Theory of Mind (which exists in two forms, essentially modelling through reason or imagination) is not the same as Empathy, which allows us to feel another's state rather than analyse or mimic it. He then brings on board the work of Lisa Zunshine, who explores the relationship between fiction and empathy, arguing that by definition readers of fiction are engaged in the process of attributing mental characteristics to others.

Five short chapters follow. The first considers sf as a literature of wonder, beginning the discussion with Fredric Brown's two-line squib about the last man on Earth hearing a knock at the door – described several times as a 'poem', though to argue about this is surely not germane: Pagan is surely right to consider how the lines have the richness and complexity of a poem. Crucially, however, for Pagan sf is a literature of Otherness. From Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement Pagan moves to psychology, philosophy and neuroscience: the 'knocker' would surely have the semiotic concept of knocking at a door (an act of drawing attention or communication). Although Pagan doesn't go into the many other interpretations of the story which interrogate the category of 'not-man', they are all valid here. The second chapter considers Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), often called the first sf novel because of its treatment of post-Davy/Galvini speculations about life and its possible creation. But it is also a novel of *mind* – of the creature's coming to understand the nature of the world around him, and Victor Frankenstein's own 'feeble theory of mind'. Frankenstein reads his Creature as malevolent from the very beginning, though when the Creature encounters Frankenstein at Chamonix, he speaks of his compassion to others, his sorrow at his experience of the death of the hero of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and his 'love and humanity': 'misery made me a fiend'. Shelley, Pagan argues, was one of the first writers to imply a link between human attitudes towards 'unearthly' (a word used several times in *Frankenstein*) difference and failure of theory of mind/empathy.

In contrast, the protagonist of Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) is 'so literally open-minded that as the novel progresses he allows his mind to fuse with other minds so as to become part of a "cosmic mind"'. Perhaps because of the complexity and perceptiveness of Stapledon's scenario, expanding into a range of other worlds and ways of thinking subsequent sf is still catching up with, it is able to express alienation as well as the more lucid engagement with the mind of the Star Maker itself, and Pagan sees the novel as encapsulating

the triumph of theory of mind over empathy. A.E. Van Vogt's *Slan* (1940) is in its pulp velocity much less complex than *Star Maker*, but its blurring of the human/ non-human boundaries through the creation of two kinds of slan (the tendrilled, telepathic slans and the second-order, much more limited slans without tendrils) allow for speculation about the literary metaphor of 'reading minds'. *Slan* can be seen as a response to John W. Campbell's call for aliens who were as smart as humans but think *differently*. Finally, Pagan discusses Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) which, as many have recognized, owes much to Dick's debt to Van Vogt . Pagan brings out the way Dick reverses and mutates the plot strands of Van Vogt's novel and in due case highlights his own particular obsession: the nature of the human and the use of androids to explore human empathy. His insights about the way an echo of the grin wrinkling the cheeks of Frankenstein's creature as we (and he) view it coming to life may appear in the 'crooked tuneless smile' which Isidore notices on the face of Roy Batty (and what these smiles might *mean*) are particularly interesting, as are his teasing out of the distinctions between the android Rachel Rosen's use of theory of mind and the leaching-out of affective empathy between other characters, though the brevity of the format precludes a lengthy exegesis of any of these insights.

Pagan writes clearly and accessibly and this book would be an excellent choice for an introduction to the idea of the way sf can act as an exploration of ideas about the mind, or consciousness. Indeed, its virtues go far beyond the classroom: it would be rewarding for the general reader, and the science fiction fan would find the combination of Stapledon and Van Vogt nigh irresistible; though both categories of readers might need their attention drawn to occasional slips of perception which almost but not quite mislead. Pagan tells us that '*Slan* was different from most of the other stories in the pulp magazines in that as well as appearing in [*Astounding*] it was also published as a novel in hardcover'. Unpicking the number of misinterpretations of sf publishing history here would take far too long; but briefly, there is partial truth here, though numerous *other* magazine serials of the '40s became hardback novels in the decades that followed – and citing the 1968 Doubleday edition does not prove its importance as a Golden Age Classic. The 1946 Arkham House and 1951 Simon & Schuster editions perhaps better show its reception at a time when comparatively few sf novels achieved hardback status. Similarly, to note that Dick 'rapidly began to take his place as a leading member of the "New Wave" or Cyberpunk generation' confuses the connection between '60s New Wave and '80s cyberpunk as well as the nature of Dick's adoption by the New Wave. These quibbles apart, it is an interesting and welcome, if expensive – even the ebook is £30 – venture.

Susan M. Bernardo, ed. *Environments in Science Fiction: Essays on Alternative Spaces* (McFarland, 2014, 208pp, £36.50)

Reviewed by Alison Tedman (Buckinghamshire New University)

This collection of essays examines the relationship between the human or non-human subject and their environment in science fiction, focusing on literary texts from the 19th century onwards, and utilizing literary and critical theory. The novels under analysis encompass Gothic science fiction, English ecotopian fantasy, Czech satire, feminist cyberpunk, and postcolonial and post-apocalyptic science fiction.

In her introduction, Bernardo delineates 'space, place and environment' in ecocriticism, and explains with reference to Lawrence Buell and Ursula Heise that 'place and place-attachment' are not necessarily progressive concepts. In the novels discussed, 'place is a site of production and often becomes contentious'. Bernardo also explores ecocriticism's dialogue with literary criticism and theory, one that the collection aims to forward. A number of the essays deal more specifically than others with ecological concerns. Some bring out 'biophilia', defined by Buell in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) as 'the power of active interaction with the living earth [...] to reshape human being'. There are aspects of 'the tenets of ecocentrism, sufficiency and embeddedness' that Lisa Garforth has attributed to deep green ecology in her article 'Ideal Nature: Utopias of Landscape and Loss' (2006). These concerns are particularly apparent in the readings of ecotopian or dystopian narratives, although individual essays also engage productively with feminist and post-colonial studies among others, in combination with critical theory, and are relevant to debates in a range of fields.

Given its globally and historically diverse material, the book's thematic division into three parts is effective. Recurring themes include the interrelation between place, marginalization and resistant identity, and the status of discourse, including the scientific report. The first part offers critical approaches for assessing the relationships between the ostensibly powerless or marginalized and their environments. Lauren J. Lacey, following Neal Easterbrook, applies the concept of heterotopia to *The Long Earth* (Baxter and Pratchett 2012), *The Word for World is Forest* (Le Guin 1976), and *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (Delany 1984). For Lacey, heterotopia offers a radical way of formulating the novels' relation between (natural) places and ecocentric, non-fixed identities. Such identities are contrasted in the texts with colonial, anthropocentric perspectives. The chapter utilizes a range of theorists, including Ralph Pordzik, whose 'pluriverse' Lacey neatly maps to Pratchett's multiverse. She claims that a description of diverse 'steppers' in *The Long Earth* 'is the epitome of a heterotopian conception of place and an accompanying fragmented sense of

subjectivity'. Unlike the settlers who seek to colonize parallel Earths as utopia, 'the nomads embrace the idea of […] a heterotopia'.

The next two essays investigate other forms of spatial difference. Melanie A. Morotta analyses the ways in which sf can create 'the dystopic area that the unconforming masses live in'. Such spaces she finds to be 'utopias for the marginalized' that help to resist patriarchy. Through Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* [outside USA: *Body of Glass*] (1991) and Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994), Morotta addresses the revisionist strategies of feminist post-cyberpunk, and its capacity to envision a hero who helps her community, in a development from early cyberpunk's male 'lone wolf'. Following this, Jonathan P. Lewis applies Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work, among others, to Neal Stephenson's *Anathem* (2008). Lewis argues that '"nomad" or "smooth" space, which may be unknown, unmapped, or unfamiliar' works against 'State space'.

In part two, Adam Lawrence develops an ecocritical study of Karel Čapek's 1936 satire *War with the Newts*, applying critical ideas that include Deleuze and Guattari's 'dual concept of deterritorialization-reterritorialization'. The novel deals with the oppression of speaking salamanders who eventually revolt. Lawrence scrutinizes the ways in which the salamanders' behaviour and language are both altered by and change that of their colonizers. Crucially, he shows that humans fail to grasp the salamanders' diversity from the pastiches of historical and scientific accounts that structure Čapek's narrative.

Matthew Hadley focuses on the scientifically constructed post-human of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to elucidate the literary space of the laboratory. Through a comparison with James Whale's 1931 screen version, he argues that the novel's laboratory was 'retroactively made visible'. After establishing the history of laboratory spaces and Bruno Latour's definitions of the laboratory and the instrument, he argues that the literary laboratory can enable 'the conditions of possibility for reworking social relations'.

Moving on to a later nineteenth-century novel that envisages social relations altered through nature, Margaret S. Kennedy focuses on William Morris' *News From Nowhere* (1890) in which 'Morris re-maps actual England into a "good place"'. The essay foregrounds the ecologically-conscious vision of sufficiency propounded by Morris through the agricultural city. Kennedy applies concepts from ecocritical, dystopian and science fiction studies, including Darko Suvin's novum, to position Morris's novel in relation to sf, and to illuminate the textual implementation of this 'urban ecotopia' or 'ecopolis'.

Part three opens with a close study of Cormack McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* (2006). Justin T. Noetzel brings out the novel's 'subterranean imagery', comparing 'versions of what exists beneath the surface' in its implications for the voyaging father and son. Continuing the quest theme, Shayani Bhattacharya considers 'the subaltern [who] speaks through silence' in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). The essay combines

postcolonial and feminist theories, including work by Hélène Cixous and Gayatri Spivak, to elucidate the novel and its 'non-linear, heteroglossic narrative'. By 'centering the decentred subaltern in [a] new history', Bhattacharya suggests the text is enabled to comment on colonial, historical and scientific discourses, on gender, and nostalgically, on place.

In an ecocritical exploration of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), Bernardo theorizes the replicants' 'terraphilia', the love for Earth that they share with human characters. Explaining that 'dealing with environmental and cultural losses creates a nostalgic longing', Bernardo draws on the Romantics, Marx, Jung and Heise to reveal the problems caused by 'alienation from the environment'. Sherryl Vint's work on speciesism is cited in analysing the novel's non-human and artificial animals, before Bernardo returns to the crucial notion of terraphilia. Although untenable in Dick's dystopian future, its existence is shown to be ultimately positive.

Hope is also discerned in the concluding essay. Keith Elphick analyses George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), drawing on key arguments by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan in addition to Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault. He highlights 'the ideological implications surrounding characters' own writings', and considers the impact of change to a dystopian society on characters' texts and their capacity to survive in their environment. The critical dystopia, he argues, can enable resistant discourse through the epistolary form, altering the role of such writing in the classic dystopia.

The book's diversity makes it relevant to a wide readership (although further proof-reading is needed). Its scope means that it complements ecocritical collections that foreground environmentalism, while similarly offering paradigms for envisaging relationships to the environment. In rereading these sf novels, *Environments in Science Fiction* adds to the field in thought-provoking ways.

Justina Robson, *Glorious Angels* (Gollancz, 2015, 507pp, £16.99)

Reviewed by Emma Filtness (Brunel University)

Increasingly, the distinctions between science fiction and fantasy are breaking down, the 'and' with its binary either/or implications being replaced with the 'as well as'. Many key authors have either written works in both genres or, more specifically, produced work that is a blend of both science fiction *and* fantasy. Contemporary examples include Gwyneth Jones, China Miéville and Justina Robson, particularly her new release *Glorious Angels*. The blend of science fiction and fantasy goes beyond the (re)location of familiar

character types from each into the same narrative, such as the elves and cyborgs of Robson's *Quantum Gravity* series (2006–11), this time taking core elements of each, fusing sf's technology with fantasy's magic so that the two become, at times, not just intertwined and indistinguishable but interdependent: 'Tralane stood, surrounded on all sides by the intricate astral light glyphs of a machine so intricately manufactured, so beautifully spellbound, she was at a loss for anything but awe.' This hybridity is a fertile fusion of some of the most alluring and essential aspects of both science fiction and fantasy, and establishes *Glorious Angels* as an intriguing, imaginative feat.

The reader is guided through the complex, twisting plot full of secrets, sex, blackmail, manipulation, politics, power struggles and the quest for knowledge by an array of wonderfully written, vivid characters, each unique and often multi-faceted. Multiple viewpoints are used throughout, giving the reader access to a range of perspectives from spy, socialite, and student to alien, general and empress, but the novel's focus is clearly the beautiful and eccentric Professor Tralane Huntingore, mother, mage and engineer. The novel opens with an anti-war pamphlet written by Tralane, which is an effective device employed to quickly orient the reader, to provide context on the world in which they will be imminently immersed: a scientific discovery that has caused a war in the south, the mounting death toll, financial ruin, mercenaries, mage weapons and the Karoo forest tribe. Set predominantly in the matriarchal Glimshard, one of eight cities of the Empire, Tralane, as heiress to a line of powerful mages and a renowned scientist, is more important than she realizes. She is powerful and highly intelligent, but rather than the arrogance that often accompanies one of such a nature, she is infinitely likeable, with endearing quirks, insecurities and doubts alongside remarkable resilience and bravery. She goes from risking her life by flying a tiny plane through a terrifying storm as if it were nothing, to panicking about what to wear to a fancy party, and despairing at her culinary failure. Tralane is in one moment a harangued mother of two tear-away teenage daughters, frustrated and baffled by typical teen behaviors, the next a lioness, fiercely protecting her cubs. Robson's touching depiction of the often fraught but ultimately unbreakable bond between mother and daughter is one of the book's strongest achievements.

In Glimshard, knowledge really is power, information is currency, with academic pursuits given priority and status, the sciences ranking above the arts. Tralane, as 'technomancer', restores and resurrects old technology, and her daughters, socialite Minnabar and keen student Isabeau, both display a natural affinity for 'spellsmithing'. In Robson's world, women are automatically in charge, occupying top positions such as professor, chief engineer and Empress. By doing so, it seems the novel is adding to the increasing number of voices calling for gender equality in areas such as the sciences, the academy and politics (and, by default, in genre fiction), addressing the need for female representation in these male-dominated professions and possibly

even advocating positive discrimination. The novel seems to argue for this, not in a one-dimensional, polemical manner, but with a considered approach that acknowledges the complex nature of gender, sexuality and the politics of power in relation to equality. In particular, Tralane's daughter Isabeau questions gender, sexual desire, biology and the method for selection of a companion or breeding mate, seeking to develop, or rather 'uncover' an 'Algorithm of Desire'. She comes to question the inherent hierarchy of her social world following an eye-opening and gorgeously written sexual encounter with General Borze, after her previous pondering on the nature of desire, which, as a woman known for her logic and academic dedication, she turns into a paper and a series of cogent notes in her diary. Isabeau comes to the conclusion, though, that her words, her papers, were 'all worthless' when even she, Glimshard's coolest and most logical woman, realizes what love is: 'She hadn't known that a person could be undone this way.'

Desire is a thread that runs throughout the novel and is at its very core. The Empress Torada rules with desire, sending it out in waves across the city – her unique 'talent' in a world where many possess such magical abilities as techomancy, infomancy and bloodmancy. As well as the mysteries surrounding desire, the novel focuses on the unknowable nature of the Karoo, a species of shape-shifting creatures that infiltrate the Empire, gaining knowledge by ingesting each other and anyone else, a sinister yet compellingly enigmatic opposition.

I would wholeheartedly agree with David Barnett's review in *The Independent* 6/3/2015 that the novel 'demands a lot from the reader – but its rewards are immensely satisfying'. As a slow-burner with its various perspectives, mysteries, politics, philosophy and layers of complexity, this novel takes dedication but will greatly reward a committed reader. Whilst billed as a stand-alone novel, *Glorious Angels* has an ending that seems to be nicely set up for sequel.
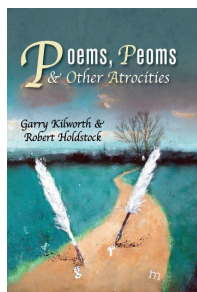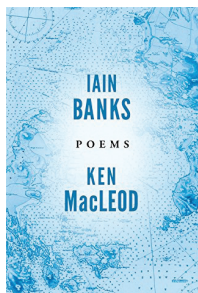
Iain Banks & Ken MacLeod, *Poems* (Little Brown, 2015, 162pp, £12.99)

Garry Kilworth & Robert Holdstock, *Poems, Peoms & Other Atrocities* (Stanza, 2013, 219pp, £13.80)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

There is a poignant congruence in the appearance of these two books. A famous author, whose fiction has changed the nature of a genre, writes poetry in private, which he exchanges with a friend and fellow author who also happens to write poetry. At one point the two friends

start to talk, perhaps half-facetiously, about getting these poems published. The famous author dies, suddenly and far too young, and the friend completes the task of collecting their poetry and getting it published. These are, therefore, the last published works of Robert Holdstock and Iain Banks.

There are differences, however. Banks began writing poetry while at school. Most of the poems collected here were written between 1973 and 1977; thereafter they became more intermittent and ceased finally in 1981 (the year, perhaps coincidentally, that he began work on *The Wasp Factory*). Holdstock, on the other hand, only began writing poetry late in life, and his work was still showing signs of maturing when he died. Their colleagues, by contrast, are both lifelong poets, and it shows, although only Garry Kilworth, easily the best of the four poets on display, has previously had a collection published– *Tree Messiah* (Envoi Poets, 1985) – some of the contents of which are reprinted here.

Not that the poetic endeavours of the other three were completely unknown. Banks had used odd lines from his poetry as song lyrics in *Espedair Street*, and *Use of Weapons* begins and ends with poems, both of which are included here. Another poem, 'Feu de Joie', was the starting point for his novel *A Song of Stone*, though for some reason he excluded that poem from this collection. Ken MacLeod has had several of his poems published in various places, including one, 'Erosion' (which is included here), incorporated into his novel *Intrusion*. And Holdstock ended his last novel, *Avilion*, with four poems, all of which are included here.

There are, not surprisingly, similarities between the two pairs of writers. Long-time friends, constantly exchanging ideas, commenting on each other's work, sharing tastes, it would be strange indeed if similarities didn't emerge in their poetry. Holdstock and Kilworth, for instance, are both clearly influenced by poets like Walt Whitman, W.B. Yeats and Ted Hughes, and the poets of the First World War, influences that would have been obvious even if Kilworth had not pointed it out in his preface. For Banks and MacLeod, on the other hand, the guiding spirit is undoubtedly T.S. Eliot, for example, in an early poem by Banks entitled 'Damage':

> The Kitchen has a *vast* ancient coal range. Kept on
> For show.
> Once, when a pan with oil in it went up in flames,
> She had to stop him; he wanted to put water on it.

These lines seem to echo the mixture of particularity and detachment, the novelistic sense that we are looking from outside at others, 'she' and 'he', not 'I', that we find in *The Waste Land*. Though it is MacLeod who most knowingly and deliberately echoes Eliot in his best poem, 'A Fertile Sea', which recasts *The Waste Land* with scientific imagery:

> The engineer, one of Zhukov's men,

was there when they took the camp.
He told me what they found:
conveyor belts
powered by treadmills, rocket engines
dragged along on sleds.

Particularly in Banks' work, however, I also kept hearing echoes of the songs he would have been listening to at the time; Pete Atkin and Clive James, for some reason, come across particularly clearly. The lines: 'You ought to be able to tell, I think, / Whether they are going or coming back / By just leaving the gaps in the ranks' from 'Zakalwe's Song' surely recalls: 'The heroes ride out in unbroken ranks / But with gaps in their number come back' from Atkin's 'Sunlight Gate'. (And I can't help thinking that the word 'leaving' in Banks' verse should be 'counting', but there are several instances of what seem like careless word choice in these poems.) Having said that, MacLeod's line in 'Caesarian' about 'the gunships at Mylae' also seems to belong with 'The Persians went ashore at Iwo Jima / Christ was in the gold mines at Kolyma' in Atkin's 'The Last Hill That Shows You All the Valley'.

It is interesting to note that 'Zakalwe's Song', which closes *Use of Weapons*, is dated December 73, presumably when Banks was drafting the novel (though the poem itself, read in isolation, contains nothing science fictional beyond its title), while 'Slight Mechanical Destruction', which opens the novel, is dated March 78. Four years later Banks would have been at work on other novels, but the gap suggests that despite its notoriously intractable structural problems, *Use of Weapons* was still very much on his mind.

Inevitably, when we encounter poetry from a writer better known as a novelist, we listen for the voice we are familiar with, for some crossover between prose and verse. In Banks' work it is quite easy to find that connection. There is, of course, specific crossover in the case of the two poems from *Use of Weapons*, or the encounter on a bus described in the poem 'Jack' that would later be incorporated into his short story 'Peace'. I suspect, also, that there is an echo of *Use of Weapons* in the poem 'The Signpost at Midnight', when Banks talks of: 'this visual cue / A remnant like an island in / A drowned caldera'. Less directly, but more tellingly, lines like 'the hand that cupped the breast, strikes the child' in 'Damage' or the reference to 'indulgent guilt' in '9' seem to prefigure the characteristic mode of Banks' fiction, the view of the contradictions inherent in being human, the capacity for violence that underlies all tenderness. And the dyspeptic view of religion is there all along: '"*Fuck me!*" (said Buddha from / The pyramid on Calgary), "*If I'd known it was going / To be this sort of party / I wouldn't have come*"' ('Outward Siege). (Parenthetically, I have no idea what Canada had done to deserve this, but I suspect that Banks really meant Calvary; as I said, there are some dodgy word choices.) If we escape the linking of prose and poetry, however, there are many lines of superb and pure poetry from Banks, as, for instance, in an excellent poem called 'Routenburn':

As though to stop
The cells' slow death and birth and beat and flow,
As though to stay
Our biped progress, product of our balanced fall,
As though to stem the flow, root out the flower
As traitors to a perfect calm,
Produced by our imagining.

MacLeod offers a smaller selection (twenty-eight poems as compared to fifty by Banks) and drawn from some forty years as opposed to the eight years of Banks's poetic career, so it is not so easy to make linkages with the fiction. On the whole, I am inclined to say there aren't such linkages, other than obliquely. The interests in science and in left-wing politics, 'The hammer rang in factory. The sickle sang in field' ('Fall 1991'), are there, and the curious mixture of atheism and fascination with religion: 'But you're still here, walking / in writing on water, / in vexed texts talking / at cross purposes' (One for the Carpenter'). These are the ideals and fascinations that make MacLeod, so they would naturally show up in any of his writing. But I think his poetry stands on its own. A verse like 'But at sunset / or dawn / our shadows dwarf / the mountains' ('Faith as a Grain of Poppy Seed') stems from a different sensibility than that which informs his fiction.

There is something similar in the relationship between the poetry of Holdstock and Kilworth in their volume. Banks, of course, had stopped writing poetry before any of his fiction was published, so in a sense we read his novels as being informed by the earlier poems. Holdstock, on the other hand, only began writing poetry late in his career, so in contrast we see his poems as being informed by the earlier fiction. The relationship is not so clear cut, however. Although there are four poems that were included in *Avilion*, they do not specifically reference Mythago Wood or pick up on elements from the novels. Indeed, the best of the four, and one of the best poems in either collection, is 'The Field of Tartan' which concerns his grandfather's experiences in the First World War, something that Holdstock returns to in several of these poems. What we get from this juxtaposition, therefore, is that the devastating effect of the Great War on those who fought in it is one of the things that lies behind the Mythago Wood stories themselves. Moreover, this is not a specifically Holdstockian influence; it is there in Kilworth's poetry also. Even a love poem like 'Ballistics' contains imagery such as: 'crawling wounded towards the wire, / love whines past my ears'. Though, to be fair, Kilworth's war poetry tends to be less specific, more wide-ranging, offering a sense of commonality with the common soldier in wars throughout history.

One aspect of Holdstock's fiction that we might find echoed in the poetry is a deep and abiding respect for nature. But then, that also comes across in the poetry of Ted Hughes, and he is one of the consistent influences in this work. This comes across somewhat jokily, for instance, in the selection of 'Crab'

poems that are specifically described as 'After Ted Hughes's "Crow" Poems'. Though I suppose we might wonder whether Holdstock is drawn to Hughes' work precisely because it recalls a mood and interest found in his own fiction. Where we do tend to get a sense of Holdstock the novelist in these poems is in the fact that his pieces tend to be long and narrative. Even a love poem like 'I Met a Ghost and Knew at Once I Loved Her' has a sense of story shaping it:

> What are you doing here? I asked.
> She replied: I could ask the same of you.
> Though she said it with a frown,
> Stepping back a pace.
> This is my world. Isn't it? I asked.
> Mine, she said, I'm sure of it.

Kilworth, in contrast, tends to write shorter, more impressionistic pieces, such as the lovely lines written on the occasion of his golden wedding anniversary: 'You are / nutmeg sprinkled / on my dreams'. When on the odd occasion that he does write a longer poem, such as 'Salute to Boyhood', the result however is superb.

One other way in which the poetry links to the fiction is that, out of the four poets, Holdstock is the one who most references writing in his verse, as in 'Butterfly Wings':

> Time tells tales,
> This flash of life, this living,
> This birth of new worlds, this growth of life,
> This constancy of connections
> Between the eyes,
> The love, the loss, the laughter, rage,
> Always leads to another page.

The fleeting rhyme that ends that passage is a rarity. Although Kilworth essays one clerihew, none of the four attempts formal poetic structures. There are no sonnets here, no sestinas, no strict rhythms or tight rhyming schemes. All is free verse. Banks and MacLeod tend to be more serious, Holdstock and Kilworth are more willing to write silly or jokey pieces, several of them gathered together as 'Peoms' at the end of the book. Holdstock's nature poem, 'Gentle Green', for instance, is just a set up for the climactic line: 'the earth was a rooty, tooty, fruity, shooty thing'. Perversely, however, I think it is this willingness to be silly that marks, if anything, a greater seriousness about the pursuit of poetry.

Be that as it may, in these two books all four, Banks and Holdstock, Kilworth and MacLeod, prove themselves poets of genuine quality and interest. Though the circumstances under which both these books have appeared lends to them an underlying sense of sadness, reflected, perhaps, in Holdstock's poem 'Haunted':

All but the turning, turning, the endless turn,
Ends in the yearning for one day more.
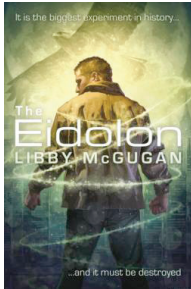
Libby McGugan, *The Eidolon* (Solaris, 2013, 250pp, £7.99)

Reviewed by Anna McFarlane (University of Glasgow)

In Libby McGugan's debut novel, we are introduced to Robert Strong, a recently unemployed Scottish physicist who has just left his girlfriend, Cora. Cora has taken comfort in New Age beliefs following the death of her sister and Robert struggles to accommodate this with his scientific perspective on the world. When Cora claims to have been visited by her dead sister, Robert departs for a climbing holiday in Tibet. However, after a near-death encounter he has some mystical experiences of his own, being rescued by Tibetan monks who share some eerie prophecies with him. Upon his return to Scotland, Robert is hired by a mysterious agency known as the Observation Research Board (ORB) to sabotage the LHC experiments at CERN and thereby prevent a global catastrophe. ORB seems to have evidence that a new particle, known as a strangelet, will be produced by the LHC. These strangelets will initiate a domino effect, converting all particles into strangelets and destroying all matter as we know it. Despite the outlandishness of McGugan's plot, this hypothetical situation has been posited in real life, a realistic albeit paranoid referent that McGugan reinforces through other real-world reference points, such as the economic recession and the declining bee population. This realistic sense is contributed to by the contemporary setting, the use of the present tense and Robert's regional accent.

However, the novel does not rest easily in the science fiction or realist genres and would perhaps more usefully be approached under the rubric of the fantastic. McGugan refers to the destruction of the world via strangelets as an 'ice-nine reaction' (175) in homage to Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), and elements of horror and fantasy are drawn in as Robert's belief in science is challenged by visions of Cora's dead sister and the appearance of the eponymous Eidolon. The term 'eidolon' is taken from the ancient Greek belief system that imagined a spirit divided into three after death: the Psyche (consciousness), the Thymus (life-force) and the Eidolon. One of the Eidolon translates the term as a 'shade, or shadow. We can move between worlds' (179). These encounters lead Robert to realize that ORB is not the science-policing body that it claims to be, but a front for the mysterious, aura-less Victor Amos, a character who brings to mind the Devil as imagined by the Rolling Stones. Amos, an apparently immortal being who feeds on humanity's fear, is attempting to sabotage the LHC because its experiments may interfere with a project of his own: a site of captivity for

human souls known as Mindscape. Although reminiscent of the robot world in *The Matrix* (1999), in Mindscape, souls rather than bodies are harvested for energy. Comparisons to *The Matrix* can be found elsewhere in the novel: Robert's journey can be compared to Neo's awakening, particularly since his guide, the eidolon Sattva, is a large, shaven-headed, black man who asks him to jump off a building in order to access his new-found powers and warns him that once he knows the truth 'there's no going back' (179). There are also references to the Greek myth of Orpheus as Robert must enter the Mindscape programme to free the captives, but without looking at the black sun that will steal his soul. Amos and his machinations turn out to be at the root of the world's contemporary problems from the recession, to climate change, to the corruption of the media which brainwashes citizens into compliance.

Robert's journey, from his committed belief in science to battling the forces of darkness, is described as a journey 'down the rabbit hole' (197) and has the same Alice-in-Wonderland conceit as Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996) or Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* (2009) as the characters discover the deeper reality behind mundane appearances, learning the value of faith and emotional intelligence as they go. The objections Robert faces from the logical part of his mind are set apart in italics, peppered with expletives, so that we can experience his resistance to the new reality unfolding around him, and the inadequacy of his previous worldview in interpreting the evidence of his own eyes. As events become more and more outlandish, Robert is forced to rely on intuition, encouraged by the eidolon. As he considers sabotaging the CERN experiments one of the eidolons asks him, 'do you believe, in the core of your being, that you're doing the right thing?' (175). Robert is forced to rely increasingly on intuition, rather than scientific knowledge and experimentation, as nothing is as it seems.

While there are moments, characteristic of a debut novel, where the narrative seams show, on the whole *Eidolon* is very well-executed and the imagery skilfully weaves the wider philosophical issues into the personal level of the story as Robert's confusion and uncertainty lead him to consider the nature of belief and how we deal with the uncertainty of the future. The interventions by the voice of Logic in Robert's head, and the arguments between Logic and Curiosity that he begins to experience as he discovers the world of the eidolon, successfully dramatize his experience of accepting more than one way of understanding the world while the imagery of quantum physics expresses philosophical issues as humans become 'entangled' with one another (176), and dark matter becomes an invisible world alongside our own. According to her website, McGugan intends for *Eidolon* to be the first in a trilogy, welcome news for those who find the beginnings of an interesting concept in Robert's adventures between worlds.

Eric Brown, *Satan's Reach* (Abaddon, 2013, 384pp, £7.99)

Reviewed by Joe Norman (Brunel University)

There is a revealing irony at the heart of *Satan's Reach*, the second novel in Eric Brown's Weird Space series: its protagonists are fighting to stop a powerful and horrific alien force from literally consuming and obliterating human culture, yet the most striking example of humanity's achievements is an oppressive, totalitarian regime called the Expansion, from which our protagonists are running. No matter how bad we might become, Brown's novel suggests, humanity is always worth fighting for.

Satan's Reach features many quintessential tropes of classic pulp sf, including bizarre alien races, planetary systems with varied geographical features and socio-political arrangements, laser battles between starships, and interstellar empires. What makes the text especially effective, however, is the addition of the fast-paced, action-driven plot of a thriller, riddled with scenes of horror and violence as well as romance. The book opens with one of two viewpoint characters Dean Harper, a gifted trader and telepath, relaxing aboard his ship and home, the *Judi Hearne*, listening to its artificial voice sing him space shanties using a synthesized version of his mother's voice. It's an excellent opener, providing a gripping start to the novel, subtle characterization of Harper, and vivid world-building. Harper's back-story is familiar: separated from parental love and influence at an early age, he becomes exploited by the Expansion values for his telepathic abilities; when he escapes, he is left aimlessly traversing the galaxy, making ends meet through risky trades. Space opera loves a mercenary, and Harper could be compared with a host of lone wolves such as John Truck from M. John Harrison's *The Centauri Device* (1974), Horza from Iain M. Banks' *Consider Phlebas* (1987) and of course Han Solo. If it's no surprise that Harper's taciturn, tough-guy demeanour is mostly a façade for a sensitive, humane man wounded by a traumatic incident in his past, it scarcely matters as Brown's careful unravelling of Harper's true nature is so effortlessly and engagingly achieved.

The other viewpoint character in *Satan's Reach*, Sharl Janaker, is hired by the Expansion to track Harper down; the narrative is structured around this pursuit, with Janaker constantly arriving just behind Harper as he leaves the latest in a string of trading post planets, escaping in the nick of time amidst the flash of laser weaponry. It's clear that Brown's sympathies are always with the victims of the Expansion, the outsiders and underdogs unwilling to accept its proto-fascist system. It makes sense when, at the novel's conclusion, Janaker and Harper understand that they have more in common than they realized, as they are revealed to be variations of the same character archetype – what Istvan Csicsery-Ronay calls the 'Handy Man', a sometimes unwilling entrepreneur for

expanding technological world-systems. As a lesbian, Janaker has the potential to reconstruct this archetype in a more progressive manner, although her hard-drinking, promiscuous tendencies leave her more as a stereotypical 'one-of-the-lads' figure than a feminist one.

Harper and Janaker learn that they are linked by mutual hatred of the Expansion, with Janaker currently doing the regime's dirty work, as Harper himself once did before the events of the novel. There seems to be little scope for organized resistance to the Expansion in Brown's books, however, with characters seemingly only able to choose between trying to escaping the Expansion and joining it – and the conclusion of *Satan's Reach* does little to suggest that this will change.

Both Janaker and Harper become reluctantly partnered in their respective narratives, the trader with a traumatized yet brave young woman Zeela, and Janaker with Kreller, an alien of the Vetch race, as visually repulsive as he is arrogant and pugnacious. Both relationships become quickly fraught – with Janaker and Kreller developing a profound dislike through their incompatible worldviews, and Harper constantly rejecting Zeela's advances – and this tension aids the momentum of both sub-narratives. Zeela and Harper's relationship features genuinely touching moments, even if they are frequently achieved through clichéd tropes such as the 'will-they-won't-they' tension of romance narratives. Brown keeps Zeela (and the reader) assuming that Harper is merely playing hard to get, aloof and uninterested in Zeela throughout, however, only to reveal a more emotionally complex reason related to his traumatic past at the novel's conclusion.

Its predecessor, *The Devil's Nebula* (2012), was an effective blend of sf and horror, establishing the titular race known simply as the Weird as impenetrably strange, almost unstoppably powerful alien antagonists. With *Satan's Reach*, however, Brown tones down the horror though allows himself occasional scenes such as the Ajantans, an alien race clearly modelled on the poison dart frog, who paralyse their prey and then rape them: 'there's a preservative in the Ajantan's jism that keeps you fresh for a month while they continue to take their pleasure'. The gruesome appearance of the Vetch, too, allows Brown to include similes as original as they are stomach-churning: 'they had faces like rectal haemorrhoids sliced into bloody strips'.

Yet, for all Brown's interest in portraying extraterrestrials as unsettling and dangerous, the sheer diversity of the Weird Space universe ensures his series does not fall into the trap of justifying racist, martial values. For all the danger they represent, the Weird are not constructed as pure evil, hell-bent on the destruction of humankind for purposes of power and domination. Instead of territory, 'They want *us*, Janaker. They want to absorb us, our knowledge, our culture […] They aren't…evil exactly, because to be evil they must have some understanding of us as creatures in our own right.' The snag is that the Weird digest culture *literally* when human beings are fed into the mouth-like orifices

located in the bodies of some manifestations of the Weird, somehow soaking up knowledge from the consumed brain.

In this manner, *Satan's Reach* is concerned with the ability of humans to live alongside the ultimate Other: extraterrestrial alien life. The strained relationship between Janaker and Kreller highlights the difficulties of cultural relativism: while Kreller notes that 'in my dealings with humans, Janaker, I've found that your ignorance of my people is vast', he describes Janaker's homosexuality as 'unnatural' and 'immoral'. By having Janaker respond, 'You sound like a few politicians I've heard about from way back, in unenlightened times', Brown aligns the Vetch with right-wing conservatives, inviting the reader to identify such parallels in Kreller's subsequent statements and behaviour. Also, by drawing links between the novum of telepathy and the human capacity for empathy, Brown highlights the importance of the latter in establishing tolerant, multicultural societies, as is familiar from many works of sf/f, such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and Ursula Le Guin's *City of Illusions* (1967).

For all of Brown's effective characterization, thrilling narrative arcs and phantasmagorical world-building, *Satan's Reach* suffers a little from stilted dialogue and unconvincing action scenes. Sometimes when Zeela and Harper tackle the complex and difficult nature of their relationship, they seem to articulate themselves a little too well, addressing the issue too directly. At points, Harper – supposedly a seasoned explorer – seems uncharacteristically naive or to endanger himself surprisingly easily. Surely a telepath of all people, even with his abilities temporarily muted, would be able to spot the actions of a fellow telepath, characterized by an almost supernatural insight into the behaviour of others? Yet Harper undermines the safety of himself and Zeela through such a mistake. Surely seasoned traders would be wary of shifty bartenders with a determination to get them drunk before sealing the deal? Yet Harper is surprised when he groggily awakens as a penniless captive.

At the conclusion of *Satan's Reach,* Brown allows both of his Weird Space novels to dovetail. Harper and Janaker meet the ragtag, misfit crew of the ship *The Paradoxical Poet* from *The Devil's Nebula* for the first time – and this feels like a strong place for third instalment *The Baba Yaga,* published in June 2015, to begin. Brown has passed over writing responsibilities to Una McCormack – an encouraging choice given that McCormack is best known for her novels within shared universes, such as those of *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*. While they may not overturn the conventions of space opera in the manner of Harrison or Banks, and they lack the political subtleties of recent works by Ann Leckie, both *The Devil's Nebula* and *Satan's Reach* are fine additions to this subgenre which make for highly entertaining reading. It feels as though there's a great deal more of the Weird Space universe yet to unravel, pertaining to both the Expansion and the Weird, and I eagerly look forward to reading the next instalment.
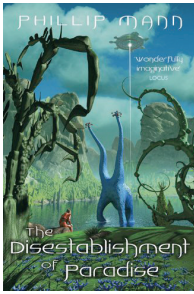
**Philip Mann, *The Disestablishment of Paradise*
(Gollancz, 2013, 516pp, £14.99)**

Reviewed by Chris Pak (University of Birmingham)

After a hiatus of seventeen years, Phillip Mann returns to science fiction with the publication of *The Disestablishment of Paradise*, a novel of terraforming set two hundred years after the first pioneers settle a planet they call Paradise. After fifty years of strip mining by the Mineral and Natural Resource Development Company, or MINIDEC, agricultural development begins. The failure to introduce animals onto the planet and the difficulty of seeding Terran crops prompts the formation of the Observation, Regeneration and Botanic Expansion research station, otherwise known as ORBE. Their efforts to improve agricultural production have been unsuccessful, while signs emerge that Paradise's edible bioforms are becoming toxic to the settlers. The narrative recounts the disestablishment of the colonial presence on Paradise and the final, solitary exploration of the planet by the director of ORBE, Dr Hera Melhuish, and her companion Arnold 'Mack' Lorimer.

The Disestablishment of Paradise is presented as a biography that details Hera's final involvement with the ORBE project and her last sojourn on Paradise. As 'much the biography of that world as of the woman', it is written many years after Paradise was abandoned before finally becoming inaccessible. The main narrative is complemented by short stories and accounts of events that took place during the early colonization of Paradise. They are in many ways the most interesting in that their elliptical relationship to the biographical narrative introduces other voices that help to create a sense of the planet's history while gesturing toward further, unresolved mysteries. The novel as a whole offers a critique of humankind's hubris in stubbornly refusing to recognize any limits to their technological mastery of nature, yet it is oblivious to the contentious bases through which it enacts this critique.

We learn in the narrator's introduction that Hera commissions a writer of children's fiction to write her biography because the narrator's 'slightly old-fashioned' style and typical audience makes her suited, in Hera's opinion, to telling the story that she herself cannot tell. Our narrator Olivia references Hera's early political pamphlet entitled 'Saving Gaia' and draws attention to the mysterious blotches on Hera's skin that indicate that she is somehow marked by Paradise and is in mysterious communion with the planet. Coupled with allusions to Epic form and to P.B. Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' (1819) our expectations are primed for a tale of epic scope that connects the longstanding project of human colonization to the history of human endeavour, focused here through the hero-figure Hera – her namesake the reigning Goddess of the Greek pantheon.

While Olivia warns us that her old-fashioned adherence to a written form marks this account as anachronistic, the most problematic aspect of the narrative is its old-fashioned approach to gender. In this future, gender roles and expectations conform to clichéd stereotypes. Many of the characters' essentialist views of women are only amplified as the narrative progresses. Despite the early signalling of Hera's alliance to feminism with her revision of a widely circulated statement often attributed to Edmund Burke, 'all that is necessary for the powers of evil to triumph is for a few good women to do nothing', she, like all of the characters in this narrative, fails to challenge the novel's dated gender coding. The narrative as a whole undermines the expectations established in the introduction and compromises Hera and the planet's centrality as the biographical subject.

Obtrusive stereotyping is frequent, serving to reinforce the view that Hera, as a woman, is simply inadequate to the challenges that she faces. Hera frequently bemoans the frailty of 'women's logic, as old as time', and at one point exclaims '*what fools we women are sometimes!*' Several characters encourage Hera to wear makeup to formal meetings with the Space Council. Men comment favourably on her appearance when she does so, giving the reader the impression that such expectations are not only normal, but that commentary on her attractiveness – and, bizarrely, her suitability for dating – is entirely appropriate in the politically charged environments of the ORBE station and the Space Council.

Hera's rival-turned-ally, Captain Abhuradin, is her foil: she is the highest ranking officer involved in the colonization project, but more importantly for the narrative she is attractive and attentive to her appearance. Especially outrageous is the way her status as the Captain of the space platform is constantly undermined. When visiting Hera, she surprises an all-male demolition team with coffee, after which they begin little repairs around Hera's solitary establishment – a clear indication that acceptable relationships are based on stereotyped gender roles. Olivia's description of Hera's appearance on first meeting her, with her hair pulled back so tightly it gives her an 'Asian cast', and most of the characters' wilful mangling of Abhuradin's name, does nothing to dispel the impression that not only are these characters sexist, but they are culturally myopic, too – which is odd for an ostensibly diverse far-future society engaged in frequent migrations throughout space.

The narrative superficially relates womanhood and nature, emphasizing the value of a maternal instinct as a fundamental mode for connecting with the alien and nature. In the context of the unsubtle stereotyping throughout the narrative, this connection establishes traditional dualisms that align the feminine, irrationality and nature against the masculine, reason and technology. Yet the narrative disrupts these associations by investing Mack with the capacity to establish stronger connections to the alien and to nature. The first expedition that arrives on Paradise is led by Captain Estelle, the first person to eat the now

coveted Paradise plum. As the narrator explains, 'it is doubtful that the name Paradise had any specific biblical connotations for the young captain, or that in seeking out fruit she was consciously mirroring the actions of our mother Eve'. Nevertheless, it appears that women, according to this narrative, are doomed to unconsciously re-enact the Fall in new contexts.

Because the planet's surface is deserted early in the narrative, Hera and her lover Mack, as the only humans present on Paradise, are invested with archetypal significance. Despite Hera's decades-long expertise in biology and ecology, and her over decade-long experience on Paradise, it is the untutored Mack whose leadership and ingenuity positions him as the individual best suited to aiding the creatures of Paradise. Mack's facility with technology as an engineer and demolition expert somehow allows him to better understand the biology of the Dendron Peripatetica, the last surviving member of a species long thought extinct. Discovery of the creature rests on Mack's facility with divination: he performs 'dowsing casts' that allow him to verify the truth or falsity of a particular statement. This ability is aligned with the irrational against Hera as a symbol of science, and it invests Mack with a connection to nature that lets him supersede Hera's authority. This eclipsing of experience is further emphasized when Mack extracts a promise from her that she is to accept all his orders unquestioningly when it comes to activities to which he has expertise: 'Hera was amazed at how easily she took orders – it was quite nice to be spoken to in the language of the team'. It is troubling that their relationship centres in part on her willingness to submit to his direction. As the narrative progresses, this authority is not challenged, and Hera recedes into the background of the narrative as Mack takes her place.

Mann is far more comfortable with historical briefs and the rendering of landscapes than with developing plausible human communities and depicting individuals' interactions. Despite its gender politics, the novel does imagine an intriguing alien world populated by bioforms that are neither plant nor animal. Three organisms dominate the text: the Tattersall weeds, the Dendron Peripatetica, and the mysterious Michelangelo-Reapers. Paradise, Hera argues, is to be valued for its 'dimension of the alien'. It offers a vantage of otherness from which to reflect on human values, and a reminder that there are limits to humankind's ability to intervene into nature.

The Michelangelo-Reapers – long thought extinct – are vectors for this sense of mystery. Their two names reflect two views of the creatures, developed over the course of the colonists' experience with Paradise. They are artistic, experimental and capable of communication, and they are dangerous, sometimes luring unsuspecting victims to their deaths. They are, we learn, stewards of Paradise, and like the mobile Dendrons are the symbol-shapers that give expression to the 'thoughts' of the Gaian planet. They remain mysterious throughout the biographical narrative, while the stories at the end of the text amplify the sense of a confused human relationship to these creatures, and

by extension to nature. If the Michelangelo-Reapers are symbols of nature's mystery and ambivalence, the Dendrons are symbols of a carefree vitality that is aligned with a pastoral innocence. As such, they stand opposed to humankind's civilizing project.

The exaptation of the bioforms on Paradise are, we learn, responses to the violence perpetrated on the planet by MINIDEC, the culling of the Michelangelo-Reapers and the Dendrons by the first colonists, and the destructive agricultural expansion of the farming communities. The Gaian planet is a dynamic and psycho-reactive force that resembles the unnamed planet of Richard McKenna's 'Hunter, Come Home' (1963), Planet 4470 in Ursula Le Guin's 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow' (1971), or even Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961). The damage to Paradise caused by the colonists' policy of ecological imperialism is exacerbated by the colonists' violence toward each other. The combined physical and psychic interventions contaminate the planet, leading to exaptations that protect the planet from further interference.

Hera and Mack's journey to assist in the parthenogenetic reproduction of the last of the Dendrons is also a sloughing off of the encumbrance of civilization as much as it is a journey of discovery. It is also a sublimated copulation. Despite over fifty years of experience, they are both romantically immature. Their developing love is complicated by the planet's positioning as a rival to both partners. This aspect is fundamental to the narrative's trajectory, to its pastoralism and its ethical commentary, and accounts in part for why Hera believes that Olivia, as a writer of children's fiction, is suited to telling this tale of the recovery of an age of innocence. It is also one of the least convincingly developed aspects of the narrative. This pastoral romance between humans and nature is not so much an engagement with otherness as a taming of that otherness and a re-establishment of 'traditional' interpersonal relationships.

The Disestablishment of Paradise is a flawed novel of terraforming and the confrontation of humankind's careless exploitation of nature. It constructs a fascinating world populated by strange creatures and gestures toward the necessity of developing a new politics and science that would better equip humankind to develop meaningful relationships with nature that would promote mutual flourishing. Yet it fails to pursue the implications of this framework. This is especially disappointing as the text seems to evince an awareness of the coherence of the living planet motif with Stoic philosophies of the 'breath of life,' or *pneuma* (πνεῦμα), of *genius loci*, of Hildegard von Bingen's *viriditas* (through the character Sister Hilda), James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, and of notions of the awakening of a planet to consciousness that echoes Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) and Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955). *The Disestablishment of Paradise* seems more interested in delineating a heroic journey across the landscape as a depth plunge to explore the contours of an outdated gender politics than in exploring the shape of a different mode of relating to nature.
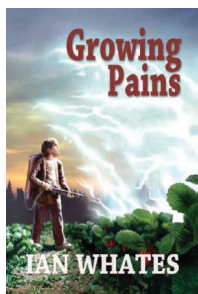
Ian Whates, *Growing Pains* (PS Publishing, 2013, 121pp, £11.99 hbk)

Reviewed by Allen Stroud (Buckinghamshire New University)

A publisher and writer for some time, Ian Whates is something of an anomaly: transcending the small press and moving amongst the larger imprints. As a writer, his work bears comparison to the best in the genre. *Growing Pains*, as a book, is a beautiful, thin hardback volume – the sort any reader would like to place on a bookshelf.

However, to admire only the shell is to ignore the creature inside. This collection of short stories gives a clear sense of Whates' ability. Each tells an unrelated story of science fiction in a multitude of possible futures. The common theme lies in the approach. Whates begins with the familiar – characters walking dogs, driving into car parks and waking up early on a Saturday morning, and then moves us into a different, future or alien context. It is this process that invokes the media-friendly term 'transrealism', as applied by Damien Walter in The *Guardian* to Margaret Atwood and Philip K. Dick. Granted, the short story may not be the form to explore these environments in detail, but the way in which we establish the real and transfer to the unreal is the common strength of the works.

Whates' construction of scenes and characters we can identify with is clearly evident in each of the stories. The first three – the titular 'Growing Pains', 'The Assistant' and 'Walking the Dog' – all use first-person and begin with the familiar. Each has their strength and provides an unusual perspective on the circumstances of each story. 'Walking the Dog' is probably my favourite with its twist delivered in the third act. The story introduces the theme of remembered pain and reflection, which is returned to in other tales.

'Morphs'*,* switches to third-person and is less familiar in its introduction. This is a complex tale of transformation between human and morph – a far more dangerous entity than its Aardman namesake. Certainly 'Morphs' could be a starting-point rather than an ending. The better stories in the collection build to a clear message, whereas the weaker ones seem less formed. There is never a question of rushing. Whates is too accomplished a writer, but occasionally you are left feeling as if the story could be developed further.

'Peeling an Onion', is a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts and covers a lot of ground in a short set of pages. The conclusion is perhaps a tiny bit obvious, but after it comes 'A Question of Timing'. This is a clear highlight, offering perhaps the most humanity and the least science fiction content of all. Imaginary friend tales are common, but rarely do they draw such a clear character and invoke such real identification. In this, Whates reserves his transformational talents for the coming of age of his main subject as he deals with pain and loss. The

locations are drawn like a real memoir and the work shines in its place at the centre of the book.

'Coffee Break' evokes images of modern Middle Eastern conflict and the impersonalized distance soldiers adopt when defining their enemy. I felt this theme could have been explored more, particularly if Bud's detachment were cracked in some way beyond his coffee crutch, revealing more of the humanity beneath his professional façade. Because of this, the ending feels a little well-trodden and the story lacks the powerful message it might have had if it were taken in a different direction.

'The Outsider' is perhaps intentionally the most difficult story to connect with owing to its defamiliarized premise. Written in mostly told narration and expositing the life of Kenneth John from beginning to end, there is a distance between us and the subject, which is bridged tentatively by recounted emotion. Nevertheless, the sum of human experience narrated and the message – the need for pain in our lives so we can understand pleasure, or bad things to measure against good things – certainly paint a portrait of humanity despite (or because of) our detachment.

'Hobbies' is possibly the most complete story. First, the ending, a cleverly worked surprise that doesn't feel like contrived justice for our protagonist. Secondly, the use of distance in the exposition – the far past mirrors the observational habits of the main character, so that the writing becomes more immediate as events catch up and overtake him. 'Shop Talk' delivers a powerful message of future prejudice. The switch to a younger female lead from the viewpoints in previous stories is a refreshing change and Whates demonstrates his ability to manage a character with different priorities. In this situation we see clearly how the old can learn from the open-mindedness of youth. The use of the new shop also pokes fun at a stereotypical village attitude. The shop itself as a character and plot novum performs admirably on a number of levels, and the story is a stark warning against insular individuals and societies trapped by the rules they make for themselves.

The final story, 'Piano Song', is haunting and its images linger long after the reading. A familiar form of long narrative and exposition with one character exploring the space echoes 'A Question of Timing' and 'The Outsider'. Again we are immersed in a story of loss and pain, of echoing memories and a very personal magic. In this we do not need an explanation of how the unexplained occurs. The surreal path of memory, mixing told story with exploration of the house and using the familiar sound of the piano as a link, flows nicely into the reflective conclusion and brings us to the end of the book with a vivid picture of how we have left, closing the door just as we close the cover.

Jack Adams, *Nequa, or, The Problem of the Ages*, ed. Mark Esping (Green Snake Press, 2015, 349pp, $24.95)

Reviewed by Michelle K. Yost

In the interest of full disclosure, I admit to having prior communication with Mark Esping, but this is only because in the tiny world of hollow earth literary studies, it would not take the fingers of both hands to count how many living people have read the mysterious *Nequa*; those who have are bound to write to each other in the effort to unravel the history of this 115-year old novel. Not many will pick this up for a light beach read, but if you have any interest in fin de siècle utopian, sf, or feminist studies, this will make a fascinating addition to one's reading list. Esping, who serendipitously came across a copy on a bookshelf and not hidden away in an archive, has meticulously researched the few clues that remain as to the authorship and inspiration for *Nequa*. Esping is not an academic, and it is painfully evident in the first paragraph of the introduction, which offers a scattered approach to historical aspects of *Nequa*'s conception, coupled with modern political commentary. He does prepare readers for a text with certain racial insinuations, eugenics often featuring in utopias of the era, but the academic should be un-fazed by this.

The essence of *Nequa*'s narrative is the adventure of 'Jack Adams' – the male identity of Cassie Van Ness – as s/he sails on the first Arctic expedition to cross the Polar verge and sail through a Symmes Hole into the inner world, a utopia called Altruria. Adams is secretly pursuing her lost love, one of the expedition leaders, Captain Ganoe, after a series of lies had led her to believe Ganoe dead causing her to marry his uncle instead. Ganoe never recognizes Adams until the last pages, having vehemently proclaimed his hate for his ex-fiancé throughout their time together. This subplot humanizes what is normally a very didactic form, and is secondary to the narrative focus of interior world that has done away with all of the flaws of the external earth. Mary Eddy Baker's relatively new concept of Christian Science forms a significant part of the imagined utopia, utilizing spiritual healing and mental health as the source of the inhabitants' perfect physical health: 'all other conditions being equal, mentally active people are not in as much danger, provided they think healthy thoughts'. This personal improvement is partnered with technological developments in electricity, chemistry, and aeronautics. Equality of the sexes, communal living, and universal education (all fairly common reform movements in nineteenth-century America) have perfected Altruria.

Nequa mediates between the dual American desires for an economically robust nation within a pastoral setting: 'not withstanding all the evidences of a highly cultivated country and the most active traffic and trade between the different sections, we nowhere discovered any indications of great cities […]

nowhere did we see vast clouds of smoke such as vitiate the atmosphere in the large cities and manufacturing districts of the outer world'. Environmentalism forms part of the utopian ideal, brought about via the reform of human practices and the application of clean, efficient technologies. The condemnation of the author's present civilization and its potential to become like Altruria emerges in a 28-page monologue on the 'Transition Period' from an Altrurian scholar, ironically prefaced by 'I need not […] enter into any lengthy explanation'.

Depth of engagement with the text will depend upon the reader's familiarity with fin de siècle speculative fiction; Esping's investigations and supplementary information are presented not in foot- or endnotes, but in an epilogue, detached from their points of relevance. He focuses on translating the meeting of character and place names, such as 'Bona Dea – goddess of Agriculture and fertility also chastity and healing' and 'Altruria […] a utopian commune near Santa Rosa California'. Esping's supplementary material is more engaged with his personal pursuit of the individuals involved with the publication of *Nequa*: Dr T.A.H. Lowe, the apparent primary author who died six years before the story appeared; his widow, Mary P. Lowe, whom Esping believes 'contributed much of the actual writing' because of the romantic subplot; and A.O. Grigsby, whose name is first on the copyright and worked in the publication of feminist and socialist works in Topeka. Esping is the first to admit that his investigation is not 'comprehensive', but that he is biased towards a favourable view of the novel's message, that it be 'reviewed and renewed, not forgotten'.

Make no mistake, this is a print-on-demand text, subject to the same plethora of textual and punctuation errors that plague such products. *However*, your only other option for reading *Nequa*, if not Esping's resurrection, is to find one of the few dozen remaining copies locked away in an archive; and *Nequa* is well worth reading for its socio-political commentary, world-building, and subplot of betrayed love. Those familiar with the feminist utopias, *Mizora* (Mary Bradley Lane) and *Herland* (Charlotte Perkins Gilman), curious about the hollow earth theories popular in the nineteenth century, who ever wondered what Christian Science would look like in fiction or, desirous of a crash-course in fin de siècle Progressive politics, will find some material of interest in these pages. What Esping has produced is not a definitive rendition of *Nequa*, but the first step in reviving a unique American utopia that has too long languished in obscurity.

The Unicorn Run: Interview with Peter S. Beagle

Transcribed and edited by Leif Carl Behmer (Houston Community College)

Peter S. Beagle is a recipient of the Locus, Nebula, World Fantasy and Mythopoeic awards, as well as the San Diego Comic-Con Inkpot Lifetime Achievement Award in Science Fiction and Fantasy. I interviewed him on April 17, 2015 in the Wilhelmina Robertson Auditorium at the University of Houston-Downtown. Our conversation followed the end of the Texas leg of The Last Unicorn Tour, part of a worldwide series of film screenings featuring the new digital print of the 1982 animation of Beagle's novel. I would like to acknowledge the Student Government Association and the Office of the President for supporting this event, as well as university president Dr Bill Flores for attending, and the Final Twist Writers' Society for its support.

Leif Behmer: My first set of questions actually relates to a conference we had recently here on campus where we talked about gender roles. I know you're highly lauded for being a writer who writes about strong characters and female characters in a genre that is typically not wellknown for that sort of thing. So, my first question is, in your opinion, what makes a strong character and how does gender representation enter into your portrayal of that character strength?

Peter S. Beagle: There's a reason that my *Last Unicorn* starts off with 'The unicorn lived in a lilac wood, and she lived all alone.' She was always female from the first sentence; I didn't think about it one way or the other. But I grew up around strong women. My mother taught, the same way that my father did. My favourite aunt taught in what was called Spanish Harlem, because she was bilingual. And my Mexican cousins are still my favourites, the only ones I'm close to now. And the older one, my cousin Electa in particular, had friends visiting her, come up from Mexico. And I had crushes on all of them. And, well, there was one named Vicki Ortiz, whom I think I'd know if I saw her on the street fifty years later. But, what I realized was that what they had had in common was that they were all strong women. They'd all broken away from a patriarchal culture to come to New York to study at Columbia, Barnard City College – but to branch off, to make a life for themselves that wasn't necessarily what they were expected to have, what they were supposed to have. And I realized finally that that was what I liked about all of them. Again, there were just strong women in my family from the first day I became aware of having a family. And, so that's simply always been there.

And besides, apart from anything else – and I don't know how else to put this – at least in fantasy, women are simply more fun to write about. I can remember being the middle man on a panel in Oregon State. Lord, this would have been 1975–76, with Ursula Le Guin on one side of me and Vonda McIntyre

on the other; they're both old friends, both marvellous writers. For me, Ursula is still the master. And I was enjoying myself immensely just listening to the two of them, but there got to be rustling and grumbling in the back of the hall, a number of male students complaining they had come to hear talk about some good ol' rocket-jockeying science fiction, and not all this 'shrill feminism'. I remember the phrase. And as though they had been planning for it, Ursula peered around me and said, 'Vonda, I don't know how many times I've told you about being shrill.' And Vonda, without missing a beat said, 'No, Ursula, dear, I'm strident. You're shrill.' I remember that as a great moment in show business, me in the middle just listening. And, I don't know, simply that whether fantasy or science fiction, the characters that most caught my attention were usually always female, and maybe because the writers have to work harder at putting them into that kind of background.

But just thinking about it in my story, my favourite of my own books, *The Innkeeper's Song*, and in the world that I kept sneaking back to and setting stories in, which we just called The Innkeeper's World because nobody knows what to call it. I never gave that world a name. Most of the stories feature or are told by women of one sort or another. There is one I am particularly fond of, a small fierce heart-broken black woman, named Lal – Lalkhamsin-khamsolal, variously know as Lal Alone, Lal After Dark, Sailor Lal – who was never supposed to be a mercenary. She was never supposed to be, as she says flatly, somebody that my mother would not have liked very much. She was meant to be a tribal storyteller, one who tells stories exactly the way they've always been told and trains with a disciple to tell them in the same way. And, in the end in the last story, she's no longer a mercenary; she's what she was supposed to be, living with a desert tribe telling stories. And there is one story that is told by one of her trainees, one young woman who learned the story from her, who refers to her and is telling it exactly in the way that she learned it. I always worry about Lal. I find myself going back there to make sure she's alright.

LB: You seem to enjoy poking fun at traditional character tropes like the damsel in distress to develop unique character interactions. As a writer, have you tried to avoid the damsel in distress trope or have you decided to embrace it?

PSB: I've tried to avoid it. There are a number of tropes that you either try to avoid or to turn on their heads. You've got to do something with them, and with *The Last Unicorn* in particular, I took classic characters out of classic western fairy tales – wicked king, good noble prince, magician – and tried to do something else with them. In the same way, *The Last Unicorn* was really developing, and let it develop, into both a fairy tale and a spoof on fairy tales, which is very hard to pull off. It took me a while to realize I was doing it. But, now the term is 'metafiction' in the sense that Schmendrick says at one point to Molly, 'Haven't you ever been in a fairy tale before?' The only book I can think of that pulls this off really well is *The Princess Bride*, which I'm very fond of. But again, I find these things out as I'm going along. So by the time I got to the end of *The Last*

Unicorn, where Schmendrick is approached by the princess Alisson Jocelyn, who begins to tell him the classic story about three brothers and someone who, you know, cast them into a fell prison because she won't marry his son, his fat son, the Lord Dudley. And Schmendrick stops her and sends her off after Prince Lir saying, 'The man you want just went that way. He's a good man, better than any cause is worth. I send all my princesses to him.'

And again, I was just playing with the trope, or whatever you want to call it. I don't always do that, but I know that I didn't set out to be, quote, 'a fantasy writer'. Back then, when I started out in the late '50s and '60s, there wasn't nearly as much genrefication as there is now. If I think about the *New York Times Book Review*, in which my earliest books were reviewed, but as genuine fiction. The only genre I can remember was mysteries. They did have a columnist reviewer who specialized in mysteries, and would about once a month review a batch of books that had been dumped on her desk, or his desk, all at once. But as far as the rest goes, my old mentor, the guy *The Last Unicorn* is dedicated to, Robert Nathan, was just reviewed like another novel, just reviewed like another fiction writer, as *The Last Unicorn* was and *A Fine and Private Place*. This other thing, the 'genrefication' as we say, that happened later when perhaps… maybe it started in the '80s, I'm just guessing. I can remember, I think it started possibly with *The Sword of Shannara*, by Terry Brooks, which was sent to me by my editor at Ballantine Books, back then Judy-Lynn Del Ray. I loved Judy-Lynn. She's long gone, but I was very fond of her. And she sent me this immense manuscript of *The Sword of Shannara*, and after reading a bit of it, I called her to say, 'Judy-Lynn, this isn't just a point-for-point rip-off of Tolkien, this is an 8th or 9th grade version of *The Lord of the Rings*.' And Judy-Lynn knew good stuff from trash, and would publish either one. Judy-Lynn said, 'Never mind, I know what I'm doing. This is for people who have read *The Lord of the Rings* forty times and can't quite get it up for the forty-first. I'll make a million on this one.'

Well, she made a lot more than that. The book was so successful, and launched the endless *Shannara series*, that I really do believe editors started looking for their own equivalent of *The Lord of the Rings*, their own copy. And after a while, she went to a – I remember going with my best friend – to a famous science-fiction book store in Greenwich Village and staring down aisles and aisles of paperbacks with Frank Frazetta or Frank Frazetta-influenced covers of half-naked young men rescuing three quarters-naked young women. And we stared, and I remember my friend Joe whispering, 'Peter, who are these people?' And I think that's when the total genrefication of fantasy happened. I'm glad to see that it's starting to crumble; at least, I've noticed that it is. But, I did the best I could to stay out of it. I think part of what I do was deliberately avoiding the obvious Frank Frazetta covered story. If I have dragons in a story, I shouldn't because Ursula Le Guin's dragons should have put an end to anybody else ever messing with that creature. I never knew any dragons like hers. But there's one story of mine called 'Oakland Dragon Blues' which has to do with a dragon

plopping down at the intersection where I live. And the only other is a book that's not finished yet called *I'm Afraid You've Got Dragons,* which deals with a world which, for the most part, there still are a few big, mean, dangerous dragons; but for the most part, they're vermin. They get into the walls and you call the dragon exterminator to get rid of them. And the hero is a young man who inherited the job from his father. He doesn't like the job at all, and he really does like these little dragons. He and his family, his mother and two brothers, are even – two sisters, rather – are even sheltering a few. You try to do something with something that's already there that nobody else is doing. And I'm having fun with this book. I'm really hopping to finish it this year. But that's it. If you're stuck with creatures or types that everyone else is writing about, either ignore them altogether, or just for goodness sake try to invert them, try to turn them inside out, do something.

LB: So aside from the damsel in distress, then, are there any other tropes that you find useful, that you found to be useful in getting your male and female characters to display their strengths that haven't been getting old?

PSB: As I said, so much of it is making it up as I go along that I'm just aware of what I don't want to do, not so much what I want to do. I want to make absolutely certain not to go anywhere near the classic hero's journey, *Star Wars* sort of story. I was taken to see a private showing of *Star Wars* in 1977 by Judy-Lynn and a couple of other people from publishing. It was all I could do not to fall asleep. I still feel like that because they included almost every stereotyped character whom I've tried to avoid all these years, and people were writing very learned papers about their connections to classic myth. And all I know to say is that my one connection with that world is knowing every episode of *Star Trek* and having written a script for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, because it's not that they didn't screw up, didn't fall into cliché – of course they did, sometimes dreadfully – but all the same, that original *Star Trek* was really not science fiction at all, but fantasy. I could do something with that. It always comes down to looking at a work or a type of fiction or a cliché and thinking, 'What could I do with that? There's got to be something', and stumbling into it sometimes. 'Okay, Lal is a mercenary, but what else is she?' And I have a character in the Innkeeper's World who's either a fox who can turn into a dirty old man or a scoundrelly old man who can turn into a fox. You're never sure, I'm not. All I know is that I stole the image from the Japanese legends of the fox shape-shifter, primarily the fox woman, and also having lived in the country and hearing foxes at night. They don't howl like wolves, or yap or wail like coyotes. They have a cold staccato sort of bark. And I tried to write dialogue for this fox character that might read like fox talk translated into English. Always try to find something else to do.

LB: I'd like to move the topic now to magic in storytelling. You seem to work with several distinct systems of magic across your works, like Mommy Fortuna's illusionary magic, Schmendrick's vocal incantations, and the supernatural nature of beasts. How do these systems help you with characterization?

PSB: Again, it's stumbling around trying to get it right. I tender great sympathy for Mommy Fortuna because as she says when urged by the unicorn to give up what she does, she just snarls, 'I'd quit show business first.' And that's literally a reference to an old joke in my childhood about the man who has been sweeping up behind the elephants in the circus for forty years. And when it's suggested to him that there's really no future in this sort of work and that he might want to consider giving it up, he was just outraged. 'What, and leave show business?' Well, if show business is sweeping up elephant dung… it depends on what matters to you, and Mommy Fortuna knows that sooner or later a creature like the harpy will kill her. She knows that, but I've known people who would be perfectly willing to die – and sometimes die brutally – if they were recognized, if they were noticed on the six o'clock news for whatever risks they've taken, or… Show business is a very strange lure. I have known people whom I've always felt would be perfectly capable of killing somebody just so they'd be on the six o'clock news. We have those, in this culture especially, but not only this one.

And on the other hand, Schmendrick's magic is dead serious, he just gets it wrong. It's like people who really do want to study a language but have no ear for music, so they never pick up the music of the language, and that's the first part of it. But Schmendrick does find his way, almost past sound, into the magic that is part of himself. But he very well might have missed it, it's just that he's lived much longer than anybody thinks. And I know Alan Arkin, who played Schmendrick in the DVD, the movie, was the only one of the actors who did not know the book. Christopher Lee knew it, practically by heart. But Alan was a very thoughtful man. He's about eighty, now. He told me that 'I have lived ever since trying to live by the wisdom I learned from Schmendrick.' And, particularly as an improvisational actor, which is much more fun for him than reciting lines, which is why he had been in one play, atthe very beginning of his career, which was a hit, and which trapped him forever doing the same lines in the same scenes, unable to improvise at all for fear of throwing the other actors off. In the same way, his motto, he told me, has become Schmendrick's line 'Magic, magic do as you will', which reminds me, I have to write to him because he's recently had heart surgery and I'm anxious to make sure he's alright. I haven't heard. We correspond, telling each other old Jewish jokes that we learned from our fathers. So when I actually get to hook up my laptop or when I get home I need to email him to make sure he's okay.

But magic, and this is important, magic has to come naturally out of its surroundings. That is, people think writing fantasy is much easier than it actually is, because you can always make up a few of words that sound as though they come from another language, and when necessary you can have someone gesture hypnotically or pronounce certain words and everything will be alright. Fantasy actually needs to be much more realistically grounded than you might think. There are things in mainstream fiction that your audience will take for granted as part of the language, but I can't afford that. For setting something in

a fantasy, I need to make sure that the audience understands the rules and the landscape of that world. The story I'm going to read later today is not a fantasy at all. 'The Bridge Partner' comes out of a nightmare that my girlfriend had and told me about when she woke up. And, it just stayed with me and stayed with me until I had to do something with it. It's listed among *The Best American Mysteries* of 2012. I don't think it's a mystery at all, but I love mysteries and so I was delighted to have it listed, but I don't really think it's a mystery; it just is what it is. Maybe it's a psychological thriller, maybe a horror story, hard to say. You'll have to decide.

LB: Very interesting. I think you have already anticipated my next topic, which is about genrefication. You mentioned just earlier that you prefer to be thought of as a writer who writes fantasy as opposed to a 'fantasy writer'. Can you explain that distinction for us briefly and why that's important to you?

PSB: I'm not sure exactly except that I think… I don't start out thinking I'm trying to write out a fantasy story. If there's gonna be fantasy, it sneaks in. And then I have to think of certain things. If there is going to be a fantasy element, what is it and could I do without it? Do I really need it? And how would it work? I actually try to avoid magic until I can't help it. And so many people think of it as the *deus ex machina*, the god from the machine. You know, you'd always throw in magic and that'll get the heroine or hero out of the scrape they're in. It doesn't work like that, or if it does, it won't be believable for a moment. You really have to work hard on, as I said, on believability, realism, of fantasy in the world you set it in. Again, the best I know at that is Ursula in her *Earthsea* series. There's just enough magic as necessary that it doesn't get in the way of her character's realism. It's a very tricky balance. You can go a long way before you finally figure it out. And that's another thing, every story is different. I used to say that I wish I were a plumber. First, they have a better union, and secondly, if I were a plumber I'd have a set of tools that worked in this situation or that situation, this kind of pipe or that kind of hose, that kind of problem. But as it is, doing what I do, I almost have to invent new tools for every generation, or for every situation, for every story that I write. I have learned a few things over the years, but they're not necessarily things that would get me out of a plot situation that if I thought about I wouldn't have stumbled into. Mostly, they're just plain experience at least knowing what I can't do, what I'd better not do. And as always, there's that little card on the wall, 'Think, schmuck.' That really matters to me, just think. Okay, your technique is to paint yourself into a corner and then think of a way to get out of it. Oh, but this time you've *really* done it.

For me, dialogue and character are my strengths. I know it, they are the most fun for me. Plot is a pain in the ass. And I'll go over that, work on it, then try it on other people whose opinions I respect before I've finally gotten a solid box of a plot, so to speak, where the corners all fit each other and everything looks as though it came from the same place, the same wood. But that's tricky, and sometimes my business manager, Connor Cochran, is a particularly good

editor because he can usually put his finger on the hole in the plot that I was hoping nobody would notice, the soft spot. My former wife, who is the best writer I ever knew, used to talk about stories as having a beginning and ending, and in between you have to watch out for what she called 'the mashed potatoes', the filler, the stuff in the middle that you're writing because you can't think of what else to write. You're tap dancing. You try to eliminate as much of the filler as you possibly can. It all takes time, it all takes screwing it up, which is finally the best teacher I know. I've had a couple of wonderful teachers in college, and I know that there is the software out there that purports to teach you how to write fiction, but I've told classes that your number one teacher is that million words of crap you're gonna write before you finally get to something really good. And I've told them, 'I'm on my second or third million, myself. I'm not gonna make your mistakes because I've already done them, just fifteen or twenty times. I'm on to a much higher class of mistake.' But that's usually what it is. I stumble along and try to figure, 'Well, that worked once. That worked in such 'n' such a story. It's not gonna work now.' And I try, that's another part, I try very hard to keep my stories from resembling each other. I try to make them as different as I possibly can. For me, that's exciting, but it's also exhausting.

LB: This relates to another topic. So we've seen the genrefication of fantasy occurring. There's also been an issue of literary acceptance in academia with fantasy literature. Now, you've experienced some personal trials gaining acceptance with your work during your years at Stanford University. What would you say was the most important thing you did to help you succeed in that programme?

PSB: Getting *really* pissed off at Frank O'Connor. Frank O'Connor was a great Irish short story writer, but an incredibly dogmatic man. A charmer, but somebody who knew exactly what he wanted and had no time for a genre, or style, or a story that didn't fit what he imagined story to be. He went right down the list the first couple of days he ran the class by pinpointing and stepping on everybody's, *everybody's* darlings. There was a fine Australian writer named Chris Koch, who wrote the story that became the movie *The Year of Living Dangerously*, in that class. Chris's favourite writer, well after Shakespeare, was D.H. Lawrence, and O'Connor trashed D.H. Lawrence unmercifully. And Chris more or less stopped coming to class. I was cool. Other people's toes were getting stepped on, but so far, he hadn't gotten to me. And then, he had some kind of distinction between 'writers' and 'storytellers'. And because I was in my Isak Dinesen phase, trying very much to write the way she did, I asked where Isak Dinesen fell in that division. And O'Connor said, well he couldn't really say because her stories bored him so much that he never finished one.

And he particularly hated fantasy. There was a young woman in the class who came up with what I thought was a beautiful, small fantasy set in Mexico and he trashed it simply because it was fantasy. And I was furious. I holed up in Berkeley at a friend's place for a couple of days and wrote the story that became

'Come Lady Death'. And O'Connor gave it a beautiful Irish reading. He'd been a director of the Abbey Theatre, the most famous theatre in Ireland, and he read it beautifully and said, looking around to the class, 'This is a beautifully written story. I don't like it.' And that was that.

That story is really the only good thing I did in that class, and I wrote an entire second novel, which was turned down by my publisher for perfectly good reasons. But, I remember that story, which has followed me around ever since and become among other things an opera, because I was in a class, for heaven's sake, with Larry McMurtry and Ken Kesey, Gurney Norman, Chris Koch and a mess of writers you might not have heard of, but they're all, as far as I was concerned, better than I. My ego took such a pounding that year that I'm just grateful to look at 'Come Lady Death' and think, 'Well, at least that's not so bad.'

But barring that, I've never had much truck with the academy simply because I've never taught, except for two quarters at the University of Washington back in 1988. I taught a class in screenwriting and one in novel writing. And I enjoyed it. That was fun, and it made the house payments on my house in Bainbridge Island for a year. But in fact, I knew as guest professor I didn't have to go to faculty meetings, as, if I stayed on and joined the faculty, I would. And I knew better. I knew way better. There's no academic in me. The best example I can give is when I made the mistake of going to a seminar. It was in Fort Lauderdale some years ago, Florida, the Association for the Study of the Fantastic in the Arts, sort of like the Modern Language Association for fantasy. A woman I liked and respected did a paper on my least-known novel *The Folk of the Air*, in which she commented how clever it was of me to name a dumpy, late middle-aged Greek woman, whose actually a very, very old goddess, Athanasia – Sia for short – because in Greek, Athanasia apparently means immortal beauty. Now, wasn't that just a perfect tip-off to who that woman really is? And then I had to get up afterwards and say, 'Jane, I named her Athanasia because I had a terrific crush on this Greek girl in one of my high school classes whose name was Sia, Athanasia, and when I came to develop that character that was the only Greek name that came to mind.' And that's perfectly true, and that's why I don't read a lot of criticism, although I have friends who are in the academy and whose work I respect a great deal. But I simply can't do it. I don't know the language.

LB: What advice would you give students today who aspire to graduate with a degree in creative writing?

PSB: A woman I lived with in Seattle for ten years, who is the best poet I ever knew and to whom I still send a birthday card each year, even though she's currently not speaking to me, created the MFA programme at the University of Washington, and I think lived to regret it, because when I started out, there were very few colleges or universities who gave a degree, let alone had a programme, in creative writing. Iowa State, yes. Harvard… yes, I believe, yes Harvard. And the University of Pittsburgh, where I went. Now, it's almost

like, I don't know, in a way force-feeding geese to produce *foie gras*, to fatten up their livers. I don't know that that's the best way in the world to produce writers. It's not that it can't happen, it's not that I haven't met people who went through an MFA degree. But I guess my idea of a writer is my old friend, Jack Cady. Jack taught at Pacific Lutheran University. But Jack hadn't always been a published writer, though I think he always wrote. Jack had been merchant seaman, he had been an auctioneer; he had been one of those people who climbs poles for the telephone company. And Jack loved literature as much or more than anybody I've ever known. He was a specialist in the nineteenth-century American Transcendentalists. But Jack was one of the people who so loved talking literature that he would stay up late with you comparing Charles Stewart Pierce with Ralph Waldo Emmerson, or simply arguing, you know, about comma placement. Anything to do with literature. And he'd come by out of love and out of passion, and it's not that passion can't exist in somebody working for an MFA degree, but a lot of the time, as to anything to do with education in this country, a lot of the time it's just trying to get to the union, if you will. I don't take passion like Jack's for granted and I always note it when I come across it, whether the writer is quote 'successful' or not. The university, for instance, and Lord knows it's changed so much in my time, but the university turned me off writing poetry for a good twenty years, maybe more, because when I was going to college, basically you were supposed to write poetry like T.S. Eliot, complete with footnotes and references in four languages. Oh, yeah, you could go out to the coast and try writing like that madman Ginsburg, or whatever the hell his name is. But basically, it was absolutely opposed to my notion of poetry, which is really song. And I fit by stumbling into the French tradition of some poetry, and my songs tend to be much closer to that balance, if you will, but also, I don't know, creating characters as you would in fiction. There are some songs that are just thoughtful and they're not exactly going anywhere.

But anyway, reading Yeats immediately makes me want to write poetry. And Yeats is so rooted in Celtic fairytales, Celtic history, even Celtic dreams that you can't, you know it affected anybody, affected me certainly. And finally, after Shakespeare, I suppose my favourite poet is A.E. Housman. You know, I've set one or two Housman poems to music just because they sang themselves to me when I was reading them. He was crotchety as a Latinist. You know, students were afraid of him at Oxford because if he didn't like you, if he didn't like your work, he'd let you know it, viciously. But there was another side to him that nobody knew which was very passionate, very wounded, that came out in mid-life when he wrote the book of poems called *A Shropshire Lad*. He was also deeply closeted at a time when you could go to prison for being homosexual, and the only time he almost blew it, 'cause he almost blew his cover, was when he was outraged by Oscar Wilde's being convicted and sent to hard labour. And he wrote a furious, gorgeously furious poem about a man who's being sent to prison for the colour of his hair and ends in the last verse, I remember it:

> Now 'tis oakum for his fingers and the treadmill for his feet,
> And the quarry-gang on Portland in the cold and in the heat,
> And between his spells of labour in the time he has to spare
> He can curse the God that made him for the colour of his hair.

And that's Housman in a rage. And then Housman in despair comes up with a perfect three o'clock-in-the-morning poem in four lines:

> When the bells jostle in the tower
> The hollow night amid,
> Then on my tongue the taste is sour
> Of all I ever did.

Yeah, three/three-thirty in the morning. You have moments like that. I certainly have. And I don't want to write poems like Housman. He was one of a kind. But that was where I went, to him and Yeats and James Stephens, at a time when you were supposed to write poetry like T.S. Eliot, and your examples for writing fiction were Hemingway and Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos and Edith Wharton. And I'd already discovered, you know, my man Robert Nathan and a bunch of other people who by 'n' large weren't in the programme at this or that academy. So I just stumbled along in my own particular path, but again that's why I never went into serious teaching. I simply don't know the language.
LB: Mr Beagle, thank you and your crew for joining us this afternoon. I hope you will consider doing this again in the future.
PSB: Thank you very much all of you for inviting me. Thank you, Leif, and I hope I haven't rambled too much, I tend to. Thank you all.

In Other Worlds: Review-Essay

Paul March-Russell (University of Kent)

Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age **(The Science Museum, London, 18 September 2015 – 13 March 2016)**

The Amazing World of M.C. Escher **(Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 14 October 2015 – 17 January 2016)**

Although it may seem unlikely, since the Dutch artist M.C. Escher's exacting drawings of impossible worlds are devoid of any overt political content, these two exciting exhibitions are strangely complementary. Both harness real-world science and mathematics to a mystical desire for transcendence; for a cracking-open and liberation from what passes for normative reality. Both are driven by what Escher, in unconsciously science-fictional terms, described as 'a sense of wonder' (qtd Piller 2015: 12). The major difference is that the USSR sought to transform that feeling into a technological fact and, by so doing, inculcate its citizens with a dream of higher, collective purpose.

In 1915, the Russian Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov wrote that 'for tens of centuries, the future smouldered in the world of fairy tales.' 'People predicted the railroad' when they spoke of flying horses, the airplane when speaking of magic carpets, whilst 'on a winter's night' a grandfather's tale will carry 'his listener on a magic carpet, flying faster than summer lightning and shouting *stop!* to a falling star' (Khlebnikov 1987: 263). Khlebnikov does not liken the magical device to automated transport; rather, the inevitable realization of space travel lies embedded in the very content of the fairy tale narrative. As he continues: 'The visionary aspect of fairy tales serves as a blind man's cane for mankind' (263).

In 1961, Khlebnikov's prophecy became fact. A Soviet poster, celebrating Yuri Gagarin's achievement as the first man in space, proclaimed: 'The Fairy Tale Became Truth'. The circularity between scientific and technological fact, and Khlebnikov's myth-making, his 'skyward search for knowledge' and 'harmonious coexistence of everything in the universe' (Vaingurt 2013: 123), underlines the Science Museum's new exhibition on the Soviet space programme.

Many of us are familiar with a story of the space race that describes it, variously, as a competition between the superpowers, geo-political jockeying, military one-upmanship, and an off-shoot of the arms race. All true, but the curators have wisely placed this story off-stage, into one small space where John F. Kennedy's vow to put an American on the Moon is endlessly replayed, an intersection into the larger and – in narrative terms – more significant parts of the exhibition.

Instead, the show recounts a less familiar story that has its roots in

nineteenth-century Russian mysticism; fuses revolutionary daydreaming in the arts, politics and sciences; elevates the poster and its subject – the worthy Soviet worker reborn as Promethean space traveller – to that of religious icons; and touches every aspect of cultural production, from the avant-garde to the seemingly kitsch, with a science-fictional gloss. The well-known thesis proposed by J.G. Ballard that the Space Age finished almost as soon as it had begun, 'I thought the psychological reverberations would […] manifest themselves in every conceivable way – in department store window displays and styles of furnishing, etc. […] In fact it was almost nil' (Goddard and Pringle 1976: 27), is contradicted here. Instead, in developments that evidence Owen Hatherley's recovery of a modernist aesthetic allied to left-wing politics, the iconography of the Soviet space programme infiltrated the minutiae of everyday life under the regime.

To understand that infiltration, the exhibition begins with the influence of cosmism. The dual aim of this esoteric philosophy, most associated with the writings of Nikolai Federov, was human immortality and the universal resurrection of the dead; its objective was expansion into the universe. Room One describes the direct influence or close affinities with cosmist thought by juxtaposing Federov's diagrammatic representation of his cosmogony with Suprematist art by Ilya Chasnik and Ivan Kudriashhev, Georgy Krutikov's designs for his *Flying City* (1928), and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's own diagrams for manned space travel. Although Marxist-Leninism paraded a secular understanding of historical change, and initially did little to encourage Tsiolkovsky's dream of space exploration, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 drew upon the mythic energies of collective transcendence that underscored cosmism. Konstantin Yuon's painting, *New Planet* (1921), practically the first exhibit that one encounters upon entering, captures precisely this irrational desire by depicting the Bolshevik Revolution as a cosmic event. A large checkerboard screen transects the room, replaying a sequence of images from two classics of early Russian sf cinema, Yakov Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924) and Vasili Zhuravlyov's *Cosmic Voyage* (1936); the former inspired by Cubo-Futurist art and the latter by Tsiolkovsky's writings on space flight. On the other side of this screen, as one moves into the next room, there flashes a sequence of early rocket experiments, the launch of *Sputnik* and of Laika, the first animal in space, and newspaper reactions in the West. The juxtaposition of these sequences, on either side of the screen, not only describes the transformation of science fiction into science fact but also the enduring legacy of cosmism. Significantly, the flashing checkerboard arrangement of these images turns them into icons, their formal presentation depicting their spiritual sub-text.

Although, after the initial emphasis upon dreaming, the exhibition features more substantial technological realities with a brilliant array of objects from the quotidian (tins of space food) to the extraordinary (Valentina Tereshkova's actual space capsule), the transcendent and the science-fictional are never far

ВО ИМЯ МИРА

через миры и века

away. Indeed, as Anatoly Grigoriev's sketch for his unbuilt monument *Earth-Space* shows, the influence of cosmism persisted well into the Space Age and beyond its glory years of the 1960s and early 1970s. Rightly we marvel at the endeavours of Gagarin, Tereshkova and their fellow cosmonauts, as well as the enigmatic figure of the Chief Designer, the brilliant rocket scientist Sergei Korolev, who survived arrest and imprisonment at the hands of Stalin, but we are also drawn to how that wonder takes physical form. The numerous posters, although propaganda pieces, again insist upon the importance of the Russian religious icon, sometimes offering explicit symbolic use of Mother Russia (fig. 1) and at other times a more abstract, but no less transcendent, vision of time and space conquered (fig. 2). Nikolai Charukin's poster of boy and girl cosmonauts, though, indicates how far the Space Age filtered into everyday Soviet life. So we have *matryoshka* dolls and a tea set resplendent with space designs, a samovar in the shape of *Sputnik*, commemorative postcards, and a magazine cover that proclaims 'To the stars!' Such mass-produced items could be disregarded as kitsch but to do so would be to casually dismiss the full extent to which space enthusiasm had penetrated Soviet culture.

Korolev's death and a series of technical failures meant that, finally, the Americans leapfrogged the Russians to put a man on the Moon in July 1969. Thereafter, the glamour of space exploration cooled as the Soviet Union entered the era of détente, became entrenched in its invasion of Afghanistan, and finally disintegrated: the story of Sergei Krikalev, marooned on board the *Mir* space station from May 1991 to March 1992, whilst the USSR

formally dissolved, acts as a virtual allegory for his country's fragmentation. Yet, as the symbolism of the final room suggests, the spirit of the Soviet space programme has not been exhausted. Bathed in a sepulchral blue light, with a bright red rectangle positioned directly above it, the human mannequin that orbited the Moon in 1969 in *Zond-7* lies ensconced in its protective seating. The blank inertia and vulnerability of this human-like thing evokes comparisons with Anthony Gormley's sculpture, *Transport*, suspended in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. The words of Tsiolkovsky emblazon a neighbouring wall: 'Earth is the cradle of humanity, but one cannot live in a cradle forever.'

The arrangement of this final room suggests an affinity with the cool mannerism of Escher but, in this likeness, the viewer would be mistaken. Escher repeatedly insisted upon the absence of symbolism in his work and, although allegorical readings have been applied to more metaphysical pieces such as *Encounter* (1944) and *Circle Limit IV (Heaven and Hell)* (1960), this void associates Escher not only with a modernist aesthetic of silence but also with science fiction, as in Marc Angenot's well-known formulation of the absent paradigm. Both Escher's art and the grammar of science fiction tend to literalize the object, to treat it as a thing in itself stripped of metaphorical associations, even if that object has no basis in observable reality. For Escher, responding to the new physics of Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein, 'observable reality' was at best a conceit, to be punctured and taken by surprise. In this respect, Escher's drawings not only feature affinities with the visual jokes of his contemporary, the surrealist René Magritte, but also John Clute's typology for fantastika in that both feature a gradual awakening to the novum, or other estranging element, which disrupts and causes us to re-evaluate our understanding of reality.

Although the exhibition recounts Escher's popularity outside of the art world, in particular his correspondence with the mathematicians H.S.M. Coxeter and Sir Roger
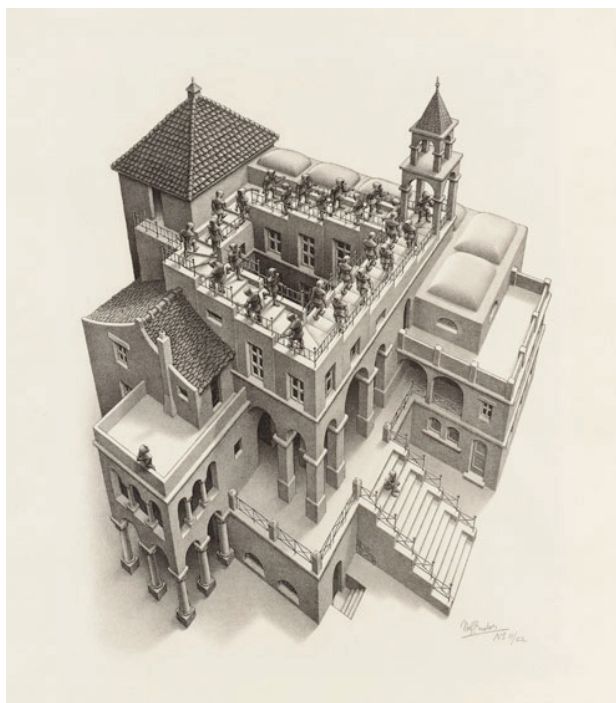
Penrose that inspired such pieces as the *Circle Limit* sequence, *Ascending and Descending* (1960) (fig. 3) and *Waterfall* (1961), as well as the unwarranted fascination of the late '60s counter-culture, it is less vocal about sf's interest in Escher's work. We do learn, though, that Stanley Kubrick approached Escher with the view to collaborating on a 'fourth-dimensional film' (Elliott 2015: 34), presumably *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), an invitation that Escher declined. However, Escher did read science fiction – H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* (1897) part-inspired the molecular drawing *Bond of Union* (1956) – whilst the lunar landscape of *Other World* (1947) and Escher's imaginary planetoids suggest a sympathetic understanding for sf tropes. Sf, too, has had a long fascination with Escher's work from reprints of his art in *New Worlds* to episodes of *Doctor Who* ('Castrovalva' (1982)) and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010), whilst Graham Sleight has suggested an analogy between the lithograph, *Drawing Hands* (1948), and the compositional structure of Christopher Priest's *The Affirmation* (1981) (Sleight 2011: v).

Escher, however, was little interested in his influence on popular culture – he even seems to have been aggrieved by his commercial success in comparison to his relative neglect by the art world. (This exhibition, first hosted by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, is the largest ever held in the UK.) Equally, although some of his early work such as his portrait of Pieter Jan Zutphen (1920), indicate an absorption of avant-garde styles derived from Cubism and art nouveau, Escher largely worked outside of modernist schools. Instead, his principal inspiration besides mathematics – Escher's father was a civil engineer, his brother a professor of crystallography – were 15th and 16th century artists such as Rogier van der Weyden, Hans Memling and, above all, Hieronymus Bosch. Bosch's triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–c. 1510), directly inspired Escher's work; for example the female visitor in *Belvedere* (1958), but Bosch's hell is also evoked by Escher's hooded and robed figures, condemned to a ceaseless and impossible perpetual motion. The medieval and fantastical roots to Escher's vision ground it in something more than the voguish Existentialism of near-contemporaries such as Albert Camus. Instead, the eternal and meaningless comedy of human existence is juxtaposed, in Escher's drawings, with the infinite spaces and unconditionally beautiful paradoxes of the cosmos. Despite the coolness of Escher's art, reflected in the meticulous detail, patience and fidelity to its own internal logic, he remains something of a Romantic. An early self-portrait, *Hand with Reflecting Sphere* (1935), places the ego centre-stage but like Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (c. 1524), which inspired John Ashbery's 1975 poem of the same name, what the ego perceives of the world around it is distorted by the ball-shaped mirror. The only thing, the self-portrait appears to suggest, that the ego can be sure of is itself; the rest is up for grabs.

Although much of the scientific and sf interest in Escher has been in his rendering of paradox and mathematical wonder, the exhibition's clear and lucid

display of Escher's work, from his earliest to his final pieces via his wanderings in Italy and Spain, his wartime experiences and later popular success, allows the viewer to consider less well-documented aspects of his art. In particular, his depiction of alien and fantastical vegetation, imaginary creatures that again suggest Bosch and medieval bestiaries, or hypertrophic insects such as the giant red ants in *Möbius Strip II* (1963). This fine hanging of nearly a hundred of Escher's drawings and preparatory sketches almost seems to invite the viewer to construct not only a geometry of his art but an ecology of the worlds in which his human characters sit, gaze, walk, hang out washing and placidly resign themselves. Such placidity would not – could not – be allowed in the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia against whose historical backdrop Escher worked in quiet isolation. Whilst the USSR was inspiring its citizens with an enthusiasm for space travel, Escher was working on the still reflections of ecologically-minded pieces such as *Drop (Dewdrop)* (1948) with an almost Blakean sensibility of seeing 'a world in a grain of sand'.

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Bettina Beinhoff asks 'why are alien languages inherently human?'

Andrew M. Butler destroys London in postmillennial sf film

Frances Foster visits the land of the dead with Ursula Le Guin and Rick Riordan

Caitlin Herington explores sexual protocols in fantasy fiction by women

Patricia Kennon unpicks the gender binaries in David Levithan's *Every Day*

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Cover image/credit: Boris Saris, 'The Fairy Tale Became Truth' (1961) Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics.